



Leading and Learning From Innovation at Teach for America

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Leading and Learning from Innovation at Teach For America

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by
Matthew Petersen

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

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For Kimmy,

Who continues to believe in me, and on my most anxious days, believes *for* me...

I love you.

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Abstract

This capstone explores my efforts to lead the implementation of new learning structures for internally funded innovation projects at Teach For America (TFA), a nationwide non-profit organization with a twenty-five year history in the educational sector. My initial Theory of Action for the development of learning processes was informed by an approach to evaluation called Developmental Evaluation (Patton, 2011) based on the Adaptive Cycle of ecological change (Gunderson & Holling, 2002), and research on organizational learning (Argyris, 1999).

Major activities that I led during the strategic project were initial exploration and project scoping, the development of individual project learning plans, and engaging in reflective stepback meetings with project grantees and their national learning partners.

In order to make inferences about the nature of learning that occurred as a result of the newly developed processes, I collected and coded data on leading indicators of desired capabilities and routines. Early results suggest that the new learning processes were not associated with leading indicators of desired learning behaviors. There was, however, suggestive evidence that certain, structured, interactions were associated with higher rates of desired behaviors.

My explanation for the results includes partial implementation of the initial strategy, and a postulation that the organization's historical culture was organized for efficiency at the expense of learning (Edmonson, 2008). Suggestive bright spots in the results and future implications for both the site and the sector are informed by Edmonson's research on learning organizations, open innovation strategy, and developmental evaluation.

Introduction

The Charge

This capstone explores my efforts to establish new learning structures for innovative projects at Teach For America, a large non-profit organization with a twenty-five year history in the education sector. The organization, in recent years, has set aside a small portion of its budget, the Breakthrough Fund, to offer competitive grants for innovative projects in the fifty regional centers. In my role as Senior Managing Director of Innovation and Organizational Learning I was responsible for all aspects of this internal innovation fund. For my strategic project I focused on one of these aspects: the creation and implementation of learning plans for each of the previously funded regional innovation awardees. If successful, both the grantee regions and the organization would learn from each of these projects and expand their capabilities in order to improve outcomes in the various contexts in which they operate.

Personal Context

Over my fifteen year career my most energizing and refueling professional moments occurred when I was involved in the playful and experimental testing of ideas.. These opportunities first arose in my role as a special education aide for students with behavioral needs. Every day was a new experiment in understanding an individual student in order to increase the likelihood that they could engage appropriately in their classes and with their peers. While focusing intently on one student, analyzing their triggers, antecedent behaviors, and contextual factors, I could reasonably predict and enhance the positive behaviors. These daily tests resulted in a new and rapidly revised approach to behavior modification for my schools most “difficult” students. It cemented the notion that often seemingly irrational behaviors from even the most challenging people, when studied deeply, are often the logical

outcome of systemic design. In the science classroom, these moments involved helping students generate hypotheses, design intentional processes to test them and seeing the wheels turn as they gathered and analyzed their results. These Eureka moments with students were a source of professional joy that I was able to find as I transitioned to school administration and did similar work by helping teachers state their intended classroom impact, plan with that impact in mind, and reflect on this process post-implementation with a plan for next steps.

I have seen in every student, staff member, and organization the ability to be intentional and experimental in daily work, and observe a deepened sense of ownership and personal efficacy when this designing, testing, reflecting approach is taken.

In the last few years of my work as a school leader it became increasingly difficult to support practitioners, and the organization as a whole, in designing, testing, and reflecting on plans for the classrooms and new ideas that they may have. The school I led was becoming part of a larger context that began to further dictate the measures of success for our school, our teachers, and our students. Interestingly enough, this increase in “data-driven” education came from the same experimental mindset that gave so much fuel to the work we were doing. For me and my staff, the loss of ownership of the measures and lack of complexity in the data that was being examined served to undermine all of the other school and classroom-based experimental practices that we developed. The collaboration time previously spent on examining practice according to internally developed measures became a compliance exercise on externally developed, less meaningful measures, and a general apathy for the data and experimentation abounded.

I chose this particular strategic project and research question to deepen my own exploration and understanding of how systems can both create the conditions for a data-

driven, experimental, and learning mindset, while maintaining the ownership and agency of the practitioners. The Teach For America context was a seemingly perfect opportunity for this exploration, due in part to the organization's history of data-driven improvement practices, combined with a concurrent shift from a highly centralized organization to a more regionally autonomous organizational model. TFA hopes this shift will better align the organization to understand and respond to various regional contexts, and ultimately improve student outcomes across the country.

Organizational Context

Teach for America (TFA) began as an idea proposed in a Princeton University undergraduate thesis by its founder, Wendy Kopp. According to Kopp, the resulting organization began with a relentless focus towards the goal of reducing educational inequity by recruiting, training and supporting a committed group of future leaders in the classroom and beyond. The initial "idea was to create a corps of top recent college graduates – people of all academic majors and career interests – who would commit to teach two years in urban and rural public schools and become lifelong leaders dedicated the goal of educational opportunity for all." (Kopp, 2003)

The organization launched in 1990, the year after Kopp's thesis was submitted, with a 500 person teaching corps covering six regions. This pipeline of new teachers has grown almost tenfold (2014's incoming corps was 4500) and the organization now includes 30,000 alumni and 2,500 full-time staff members inclusive of 50 regional offices and a national team to support the work. ("Press Release - Teach For America Fields Largest Teacher Corps In Its 20-Year History," 2010). Although significantly larger in scale than when it began, the 2014-2015 mission of the organization still contained the core elements of the initial idea of

its founder. (See Figure 1). *Note: As part of new organization-wide strategy efforts, the mission is evolving in 2015. (See Appendix A for working draft)*

<p style="text-align: center;">SNAPSHOT: TEACH FOR AMERICA</p> <p style="text-align: center;">VISION</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">MISSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To recruit diverse recent college graduates and professionals with demonstrated leadership ability to teach for a minimum of two years in low-income public schools. ➤ To provide intensive training and support so they can have an immediate positive impact on students and deepen their own understanding of what it takes to dramatically increase student achievement. ➤ To foster their leadership as alumni who work in education and other professional sectors.

Figure 1. Summary of Teach For America’s current vision and three part mission. Adapted from *Our Mission*, 2015. Retrieved from URL. Retrieved March 4, 2015, from <https://www.teachforamerica.org/our-mission>

As the organization has grown over the last 25 years, there have been multiple research studies with varying levels of rigor on the impact of its teaching corps. The most rigorous of these studies find that students in TFA classrooms have equivalent or better learning gains in elementary school (Clark et. al, 2015), and better learning gains in secondary math (Clark et al. 2013) (Decker et. al, 2004). These findings hold regardless of the experience difference between corps members and comparison teachers in the studied schools, the most recent study citing a difference of more than 13 years. (Clark et. al, 2015). While the research on corps member effectiveness is universally promising, the most rigorous research on retention in the teaching profession suggests that teaching ends up being a short-term job (2-3 years) for about half of these promising corps members. (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010).

It should be noted, that research regarding corps member effectiveness and tenure as a gauge of organizational effectiveness is a narrow view of the organization's impact. TFA is not, nor has it ever purported to be solely a teacher pipeline or preparation program, and any discussion of its effectiveness should note its growing alumni base. While gauging alumni impact is more difficult, a 2011 study of 49 entrepreneurial organizations in education cites that TFA alumni have an outsized representation as founders and members of these organization's leadership teams. (Higgins, Hess, Weiner, & Robison, 2011)

Outside the research arena, the organization has both strong supporters and vocal critics. Supporters note that the regional demand for corps members is still higher than the yearly supply (Dunn, 2014). They also state that TFA is introducing new talent into the education sector, and that a large majority of alumni remain in education related fields or are working in low-income communities (Annual Report, 2014). Critics have stated that the short tenure expected of corps members and their shortened preparation period has de-professionalized teaching (Goldstein, 2014). They have also been cited as union-busters (Kos, 2014) or willing tools for those that are hoping to undermine unions, due to their policy of taking the first job offered and their increased pipeline to charter management organizations in certain regions (Ravitch, 2013).

TFA, internally, has wrestled with some of these tensions as well. In fact, as part of the transition to new leaders (Kopp stepped down to lead a new organization, Teach for All), the new co-CEO's Matt Kramer and Elisa Villanueva Beard began their tenure with a year-long listening tour where they engaged with communities, alumni, current corps members and staff members in order to fully understand the organization's many successes and challenges (Goldstein, 2014).

Recently, based on information gathered from this tour and an organization-wide strategic planning process, TFA has embarked on a shift in organizational strategy fueled by a newly defined set of priorities with a commitment to partnering and responding to local communities and contexts. Thus, Teach for America, while achieving unprecedented scale as an education non-profit is in a state of tremendous transition: moving from a centrally managed organization to a network of affiliated regions with a national team organized to support success in and across its regions. This shift in structure is intended to allow regions to have the capacity and flexibility to maximize local impact in partnership with communities, while still allowing TFA to remain a unified entity. (“Operating Model - TFAHub,” 2014)

This newly defined set of priorities and resultant shift, in particular, created the impetus for me to choose Teach for America as a residency site. The work of the organization at this juncture very much intersected with the questions I was asking about practitioner-based innovation and ownership of the data-driven and experimental mindset. I believed that if an organization of this scale could find some answers to this persistent issue in education, much of this learning could be transferred to the sector itself. As I approached the ten-month residency, I created a set of guiding principles for the work ahead designed to capture and understand the learnings for myself and the organization.

Introduction to Six Guiding Principles

The principles I created to guide both the research and work, described below, have their own genesis in my own development as a leader. In my past work, especially when developing new structures and processes, these principles have helped me gain a greater understanding of the system in which I am working and centered my thoughts on a developmental approach. As I approached the residency, I wanted to be sure that the

judgments and decisions I was making were based on an objective analysis of the current situation, not on my own assumptions about a very well-known organization for which I had never worked. These six principles became important guideposts for me as I entered into and led new work in the organization. I briefly describe each below:

Curiosity. I have found that curiosity creates opportunities to both learn from others and build relationships. Many great mentors have modeled this step for me. Curiosity goes beyond asking good questions, as there is palpable excitement to learn, and the learning process itself is refueling and trust-building.

Developmental Approach. This particular principle helps to remind me that different people and projects are at various stages of development and the approach that I take should be dependent upon that. It also serves as a more strategic framework for selecting tools and practices that ensures I am selecting tools for utility at a specific stage, as opposed to more general utility.

Assuming Good Intentions. When stepping into a new situation, especially one that is quite different than my previous work, I need a constant reminder to assume that everyone's actions are well-intended. This principle helps to remind me to ask that "one more question" for clarification when intentions are unclear, and to operate from a well-intentioned perspective when developing narratives for why/how people operate.

Following the Emergent. In classical project management, the emergent is often discarded as "rabbit trails" or superfluous. In innovative work, emerging opportunities and learnings are sometimes the most important piece of the work. This divergent philosophy helps to remind me that the unintended outcomes and consequences of the work being done are as important as the stated outcomes, especially in innovation work.

Boundary-crossing. As a veteran public school educator and principal, I chose this residency in the spirit of this norm. Reminding myself of the learning opportunities present in boundary crossing and exploration helps to push me to cross professional and personal confines. It also ensures that I am constantly growing in the work, and not just reifying previously held beliefs about the “other” parts of work and life.

Examining assumptions. In the development of innovative ideas, it is important to unpack and examine the assumptions that were present at the genesis of the idea. There is no idea present in the world that doesn’t have assumptions baked into it, and it is important to test them before moving forward. Additionally, this principle is helpful as a reminder that I have my own assumptions that will need to be examined and tested.

Review of Knowledge for Action

Research Question: What does the research say about creating systems for innovation that maximize opportunities for innovation and learning?

Beginnings

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens”

--Ecclesiastes 3:1 (Bible, RSV)

I begin my review of knowledge in the ancient writings that undergird my Judeo-Christian faith background. In the third chapter of Ecclesiastes – Kohelet, both the Christian and Jewish bibles state that there are different purposes for different times in one’s life. In his commentary on verse 1, specifically, noted biblical scholar Adam Clarke states that “neglecting the appointed season” results in causing our own downfall (Clarke, 1967). If a person or organization is to sustain and thrive, one must be cognizant of both the season and its corresponding purpose.

This concept of “seasons” and different purposes for different times speaks to a need for a flexible and systems-based approach to approaching the work. In this type of approach, discerning the purpose and “season” of the organization dictates the organizational processes (i.e. innovation and learning processes).

TFA’s History and Growth to Scale

Knowing already that the purpose of my charge was creating processes for organizational innovation and learning at TFA, I knew a review of literature must include the organization’s genesis story and history so I could begin to understand the season that it was in, and therefore which approach should be applied for the purpose presented. Below is a brief history and discussion its growth to scale.

For the first ten years of its existence, Teach for America grew very little. According to a recent report by Bellwether partners (2015), this was in large part due to the insistence by its founder, Wendy Kopp, to operate on a national scale from the beginning (Mead, Chuong, & Goodson, 2015). The charter corps consisted of 500 teachers spread across six different regions. Kopp, in her book *One Day, All Children*, states that many advised her to “start small” with 50 corps members in one region, but she saw that as counterintuitive to the idea that TFA would be a “movement” as opposed to a model teacher training program or local non-profit. Therefore, knowing that it would be more difficult, she insisted on starting at fairly significant scale (Kopp, 2003). The organization refers to this initial period as the “dark years”, where they learned a lot but grew very little. The first ten years of the organization generated a set of learnings about what should be important and prioritized:

- A mission focus
- Effective management
- The balance of fund-raising and programming
- The centrality of core values to culture and decision-making

By the end of the 1990’s, Teach for America had become an organization with a strong culture, healthy financial position, and a focus on effective management (Mead, Chuong, & Goodson, 2015).

The combination of a healthy and sustainable organization, and increasing interest from national philanthropic organizations created an opportunity for TFA to grow toward the end of the 1990’s. Using a five-year strategic planning process, they maintained a commitment to continue to grow with quality. This growth strategy and the commitment to scaling and quality led to the development of many systems and structures of support.

Before data-driven became a ubiquitous concept in the education sector, TFA established a culture of continuous improvement characterized by defined systems for measuring corps member impact, regional quality, recruitment metrics and selection algorithms.

Towards the end of the 1990's and into the new century, TFA became increasingly intentional about internal management practices in pursuit of both scale and quality, and I needed to understand what this effective management "looked like" at TFA. The nature of this effective management was important to understand, as internal processes for management impact and inform learning and innovation.

Through my research, I found that Jerry Hauser, their COO from 1998-2005, had co-written a book *Managing to Change the World: The Non-Profit Manager's Guide to Getting Results*. In the book, he outlines what effective management looks like. He defines management as getting things done "through other people" and defines the fundamental job of an effective manager as "getting results". He notes that he made a mistake early in his tenure at TFA by focusing on mentoring and staff satisfaction as the end goal, instead of ensuring staff was achieving results. Achieving results on these organizationally defined metrics were the ultimate end, and according to Hauser, he could derive the staff satisfaction he previously sought from being clear and up front with expectations and aligning his actions and support to the results that were expected (Green, 2012).

Hauser's book outlines some best practices that he found for process management in hiring, weekly check-ins, delegation of tasks and big projects, and terminating or coaching out underperforming employees (Green, 2012). In an organization the size of TFA, governing these processes was crucial to scaling with quality (Mead, Chuong, & Goodson, 2015). This effective management approach outlined in Hauser's book, and its corresponding processes and structures are still very much in use in the organization as

evidenced in the rhythm of onboarding, meeting and project structures, feedback cycles and goal setting. Beginning with the desired outcome/result (growth, recruitment, corps member effectiveness, etc.) a successfully managed project would look similar to the process below:



Fig 2. Excerpt from TFA project management slide deck. (See Appendix B)

In 2005, in order to support the continued pace of growth and the many new regions that were launching, TFA recommitted and refined their organizational model to a highly centralized “matrix” operating model, which Jeff Wetzler, a current member of the leadership team, called a “belt and suspenders” approach to ensuring quality organizational growth. TFA built strong capacity, support and expertise nationally that mirrored regional functions so that quality growth could occur. Because the organization knew that scaling would require many new leaders in the organization, and regional variations were bound to occur as the organization grew, they felt that the matrix structure could serve to reduce this variation and increase quality through supportive management structures (J. Wetzler, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

By the fall of 2010, what had begun as a fledgling organization with a charter corps of 500 teachers in 1990 had grown to a centrally managed organization of 39 regions, 8,200 first and second year teachers, and 20,000 alumni leaders, with most of the growth occurring in the previous ten years (Press Release, 2010). TFA wrote a new growth strategy with plans to continue the quality growth and ultimately increase total corps size to 15,000 by 2015.

The tidal wave that was the education reform movement in previous years experienced a significant backlash more recently (Strauss, 2013). TFA, because of the

prominent alumni voices, their alignment with data and accountability, and some very high profile community ‘flash points’ were viewed by vocal critics as co-conspirators and were targeted by communities and unions. (Goldstein, 2014). As an illustrative example of these ‘flash points’, in the summer of 2013, Chicago schools were in the midst of an unprecedented 52 school closings. There was tremendous union and community unrest over the above-mentioned reforms in the city. Documents from a regional TFA board planning session showed projections for continued charter growth in the region and corresponding corps member growth projections. This was met with fierce opposition and many in Chicago saw it as not just an endorsement of charter schools, but that TFA was complicit and part of planning the “undermining” of traditional district schools and the teaching profession (“Is TFA Undermining the Chicago Public Schools?,” 2013). While many of the accusations were more incendiary than fact-based, these sort of ‘flash points’ served to shaped perceptions and increase external pressure.

In addition to the external and community pressures the organization was feeling, the rapid growth in the previous years also created an internal pressure on the organizational model which had previously been earmarked by consistent quality managed and supported by the national center. Many regions were becoming large organizations in their own right, with Executive Directors (ED) whose tenures were increasing and aligning themselves more with local education communities. These longer tenured ED’s did not, in all cases desire the national team’s strong system of support that was afforded by the matrix model, and were finding it increasingly limiting to do the work that they felt was needed in their various contexts (Mead, Chuong, & Goodson, 2015).

As I entered the organization in the fall of 2014, the organization was in the midst of a significant strategic shift with implications for organizational structures and processes. The

organization was hitting pause on their aggressive growth strategy, and was instead working on empowering more regional decision-making and autonomy, and a greater focus on becoming a part of local educational communities through a spirit of partnership, while the national organization re-centered on a different role for building regional capacity and ensuring a strong, unified organization. (J. Wetzler, personal communication, July 2, 2014)

As the shift occurs, new organizational processes may need to be developed. From corps member to leader in the organization, TFA measured effectiveness against a “big, measurable, goal” and managed processes toward that result (Goldstein, 2014). This effective management approach may be insufficient for the new organizational model. One of process managements major goals is “reducing variation” (Deming, 1998) and TFA is now looking for a balance of autonomy, affiliation, and accountability. It was important for me to look at what innovation literature said about the limitations of the “effective management” approach and search for a new model to follow as I built out structures and processes for innovation and learning work.

Innovation and Project Management

Some of the most successful leaders of innovation disagree with a goals-based approach. Linda Hill studied leaders of innovation from various sectors and innovative leaders view their role very differently. Innovation leaders see their role, not as visionary, but as “creators of a context” in which others are willing and able to innovate. One innovative leader even said they stopped reading leadership books because they all started with a vision, and innovation is about not having a vision (Hill, 2014).

As I began to review innovation literature more deeply, this tension between innovation leadership and TFA’s goals-oriented approach has a long and documented history in innovation research. First introduced by Joseph Schumpeter in 1934, the concept

of innovation is generally split into two broad types; one that concentrates on improving and refining the current systems based on **exploiting** and improving current knowledge, processes and products, while another **explores** alternative systems and questions the assumptions that may generate entirely new knowledge, processes or products (Schumpeter, 1934).

Mary Benner and Michael Tushman (2003), speak to this tension in their research as well. They say that process management approaches initially spur innovation. Because TFA systematizes processes, improvements on those processes can occur quickly, and one can see initial improvements in efficiencies and organizational effectiveness. While this initial improvement can be substantial, Benner and Tushman say the improvement only occurs in the initial direction of the stated vision. In other words, process management is very effective at the **exploitation** type of innovation, where organizations are improving current knowledge and skills and reducing variation in the desired outcomes. On the other hand, effective process management can inhibit **exploration**. Goals and direction-setting are the first step in process management, and these are generated from an existing knowledge base. New knowledge and exploration is often excluded from these activities (Benner & Tushman, 2003).

Michael Tushman and Charles O'Reilly's (2013) research related to innovation strategy states that successful organizations and systems must be able to employ this dual approach to innovation. In the words of Tushman, successful organizations exist in "...Multiple modes simultaneously – managing for short term efficiency by emphasizing stability and control, as well as for long term innovation by taking risks and learning by doing." They define these organizations as "ambidextrous" and argue that the leader of an

organization should ensure that a proper balance of both modes is always in existence in the organization. (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2013)

Clayton Christensen's (2003) innovation research agrees with the idea that exploration and exploitation require different processes. He speaks specifically to the period in which systems are undergoing transitions and rapid change. Christensen says that strong organizational processes for growth and exploitation will be weak and insufficient processes for exploration. Christensen argues that when organizational change occurs, previous organizational *capabilities* actually become *disabilities* in the new environment. Selecting the right "organizational home" for processes to flourish depends largely on a leader's ability to recognize the need for acquiring or building new capabilities required for the vastly different activities after an abrupt transition. (Christensen & Raynor, 2003)

This tension between innovation leadership and process management is not isolated to business, as education practitioners and researchers surface similar tradeoffs. There are some in the education sector calling for new and innovative products and processes to transform practices dramatically, while still others believe in exploiting existing strategies to promote efficiency and effectiveness (Kolderie, 2012). The exploitation stance has become increasingly in vogue in light of the recent economic austerity and the need for states, districts, and educational institutions to increase their productivity on student outcomes in an era of declining resources (Roza, 2012). Much like his business counterpart, Tushman, Ted Kolderie argues for a "split-screen" strategy that would allow for a "self-improving" system that made efforts to both improve existing practice while identifying brand new approaches to learning and schooling. He cites the dual presence of typewriters and computers, bricks and mortar stores and online retailers, and books and e-readers as

evidence that both exploitation and exploration can successfully coexist in a system (Kolderie, 2012).

While Tushman, Christensen, and Kolderie all provide a myriad of suggestions for leaders in creating organizational environments where new capabilities can be grown, the altitude of the discussion and research in business innovation often stays at the level of CEO and strategic decision-making. While overall strategy is important, my charge was to create new processes and structures for learning from projects within the existing organization, so I needed to review research on how TFA and other organizations learn and capture their learning.

Organizational Learning

Moving from the strategic lens, I began reviewing research that relates to organizational, team and individual learning processes. Chris Argyris, one of the most well-known researchers in this area, presents a nice bridge between strategy and individual; he states that level of individual inquiry in an organization is crucially important and causally linked to the learning characteristics of an entire organization (Argyris, 1999). Understanding these individual processes not only serve to inform strategic decision-making, they also acknowledge the complexity that exists in the organization.

In his book, *On Organizational learning*, Argyris presents two kinds of learning that individuals or organizations can engage in when they receive unexpected results. He calls these two types “Single Loop” and “Double Loop” Learning. The figure below is a visual representation of the concept.

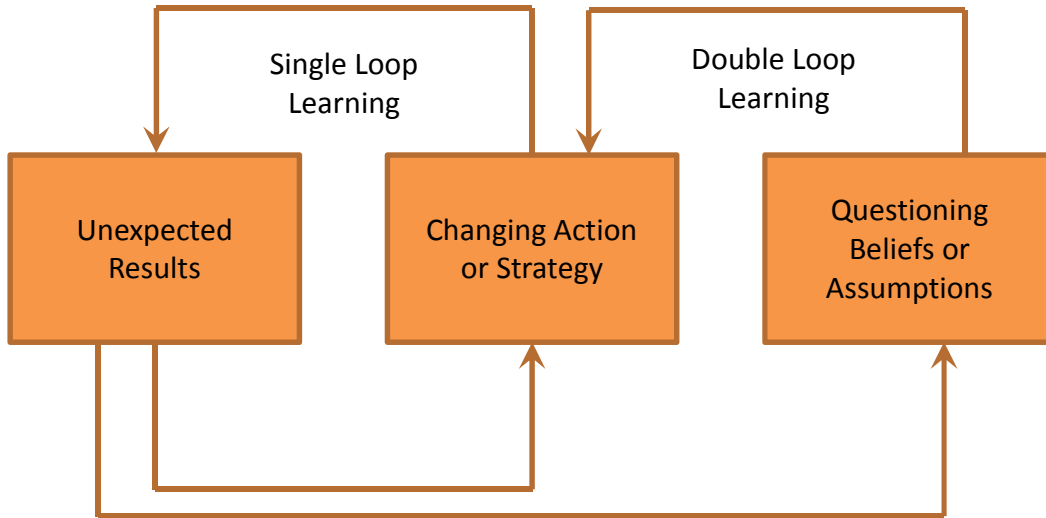


Figure 3. Visual representation of single and double loop learning. Adapted from *On Organizational Learning* (p. 68), by Argyris, 1999, Oxford, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Argyris states that all learning begins with an unexpected result, an “error”, or a mismatch between an intended consequence and the actual outcome. The usual first response to this “error” is to change the action strategies so that it does not occur again. In this case, there is no change in the variables that govern their view of the situation. Implicit assumptions, beliefs and presumed tradeoffs in order to achieve a desired outcome determine these “governing variables”. Argyris calls this learning “single loop”, as there is no change in the values and assumptions that have framed the particular situation. (Argyris, 1999)

Another possible response, as opposed to beginning at changing the actions, is to change the governing variables themselves. For example, instead of assuming individuals or teams should avoid the discussion of negative feelings, one might choose to embrace and engage the negative feelings and employ wholly different actions as a result. This type of learning, because there was a change in the situational frame, is “double loop” learning (Argyris, 1999). Other well-known researchers in the field of adult development, Bob Kegan

and Lisa Lahey (2009), reinforce the importance of this for personal and organizational development through the repeated act of “testing assumptions”. These tests ensure that the dominant frame that is guiding an individual’s actions aligns with reality. (Kegan & Lahey, 2009)

One of the barriers to double loop learning, and therefore personal and organizational development, is that the majority of people in an organization have a similar set of governing variables (Argyris called this Model I) that guide actions, also known as a “theory-in-use”. While there is some variability in what weights various individuals and teams assign to each of the variables, there is much consistency in their use. These Model I variables are:

- *Achieve a self-defined purpose*
- *Win, don’t lose*
- *Suppress negative feelings*
- *Emphasize rationality*

According to Argyris, some consequences for actions that align with these prevailing governing variables are defensiveness, a lack of free and valid information and very little public testing of new ideas. In this sort of culture, learning, especially of the double-loop variety is sub-optimal.

Another possible theory-in-use that Argyris outlines is much more conducive to learning. This Model II theory-in-use has decidedly different governing variables:

- *Valid information*
- *Free and informed choice*
- *Internal Commitment*

Argyris calls the individual operating under this theory an “Action Scientist” and the consequences of these variables are far more conducive to open, honest dialogue, risk-taking, and freedom of choice (Argyris, 1999).

Processes for learning (a.k.a. Evaluation)

There are many types and uses for evaluation, and the project required an understanding of how one can create these processes for innovation, so I felt it was important to review the various approaches. It is hard to use the term evaluation in the education sector as it has become so value-laden, but my charge (creating processes for learning) is inherently linked with evaluation. An evaluative can help to ensure that valid information is the basis for learning captured, as validity is an important construct in all types of evaluation (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002).

The simplest way to define the various evaluation methods is by grouping them into two categories: qualitative and quantitative. Evaluators use each to capture learning in organizations and university research. Evaluators use a quantitative/summative approach, informed by experimental design, to isolate the impact of a program and infer that the project or program indeed caused the measured results. One well-regarded research method is the randomized control trial (Murnane & Nelson, 2007). As opposed to the general lessons of more broad quantitative research, qualitative methods offer data specific to context that offer lessons dependent on the time and place they were collected (Shadish et al., 2002)

Debates and trends related to the “right way to evaluate” education program efforts have gone back and forth. In the 1960’s and 1970’s, a quantitative approach was preferred. For example, a 1962 randomized trial of an early intervention program coined the Perry Preschool Project began a nearly 30 year “experiment” with follow-up data collection and multiple citations to corresponding research. Many point to this single study as the policy precursor to the federally funded Head Start program and it still very much shapes the preschool policy debate to this day (“Milestone Study Resonates Decades Later,” 2015). In

the 1980's and 1990's the education research ethos shifted to a more qualitative and formative approach, as the merits of causal inference on an average population of students did not sufficiently embrace the complexity of school contexts and the clear individual differences of students. In the early 2000's, fueled largely by specificity of "scientific evaluation" expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the 2002 Education Sciences Reform Act, quantitative evaluation came back in vogue as the preference for education policy and research (Angrist, 2004).

TFA is well known for its quantitative data and outcomes-driven approach, and this is very consistent with an effective management mindset. TFA was one of the first to embrace the idea of a quantitative approach to evaluation. Dana Goldstein, in her book, the *Teacher Wars* documents the rise of the data and accountability movement. According to her and many others, the movement was fueled initially by Federal policies like Race to the Top, richly funded by reform philanthropists, and prominent TFA alumni were the local leaders of the movement (i.e. Michelle Rhee and Mike Johnston) (Goldstein, 2014). The organization's learning structures continue to value quantitative and summative research, however, there is growing use of qualitative data, specifically the use of case studies and focus groups for various pilot programming and feedback mechanisms.

While quantitative or qualitative evaluation are often presented as the choices present for structuring an evaluation system, there are many researchers who advocate for and use a more nuanced and mixed-methods approach that belies the dichotomy referenced above. Richard Murnane, specifically, outlined a promising model identified by the Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP) that calls for focusing the research agenda and evaluation on problems of practice. This particular approach would seat the research in schools, and evaluators could collaborate with school teams to ensure a finer-grained yet still

rigorous approach to knowledge generation (Murnane & Nelson, 2007). The SERP committee's recommendation aligns with the growing network improvement communities work led by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in medicine.

Michael Quinn Patton, a former President of the American Evaluation association goes one step further by defining a completely new type of evaluation, he entitled Developmental Evaluation (DE), which is designed for the evaluation of projects still in the early stages of development. Echoing Murnane's description of the work being proposed by SERP, a proficient developmental evaluator is embedded in the context of the work and brings expertise in evaluative questioning, design, and data collection to the project meetings and daily activities. The role of the evaluator is not necessarily one of objectivity and externality, but is noted for its subjectivity and focus on challenging major assumptions (Gamble, 2008). Patton does not advocate for any particular method over another, but challenges a major assumption in most formative (evaluations designed for improvement) and summative evaluations (evaluations designed for validation). Patton argues that a truly user-centered evaluation of a developing innovation should never assume a set model exists, or that the team that is implementing should "stick to the model". With a developmental lens, the reigning point of view is that the complexity of the system, the varying needs of the implementers and the repeated testing of various activities and logical assumptions will necessitate changes. The role of the evaluator is to highlight those changes, and ensure they are tracked and reflected upon.

Patton explicitly relates his thoughts on evaluation to a concept called the *adaptive cycle*. His argument, consistent with the framework, states that there is a ***time and purpose*** for the varying forms of evaluation. The stage of the project and the needs of the user will

dictate which form should be employed and it all relates to where an organization is on this cycle (Patton, 2011).

Researching the Adaptive Cycle

In the book, *Panarchy*, C.S. Holling and Lance H. Gunderson (2002) provide a framework for understanding the complex changes that happen in natural systems. Their models of natural systems provide a mental representation for reflection, discernment and action on these systems. The authors present a model for organizations that consist of a nested set of natural events going through an Adaptive Cycle (Gunderson & Holling, 2002). The inspiration for this cycle was initiated by Joseph Schumpeter in the first half of the twentieth century, as he looked at the cycle of economies in a capitalist society (Schumpeter, 1934). He noted the presence of discontinuous disturbances he called “creative destruction” that immediately preceded and followed the “boom and bust” of the economy. Ecologists took up the concept and further explicated it as a four-step naturally occurring cycle and coined the term Adaptive Cycle (Gunderson, 2002). The picture below is a visual representation of the cycle.

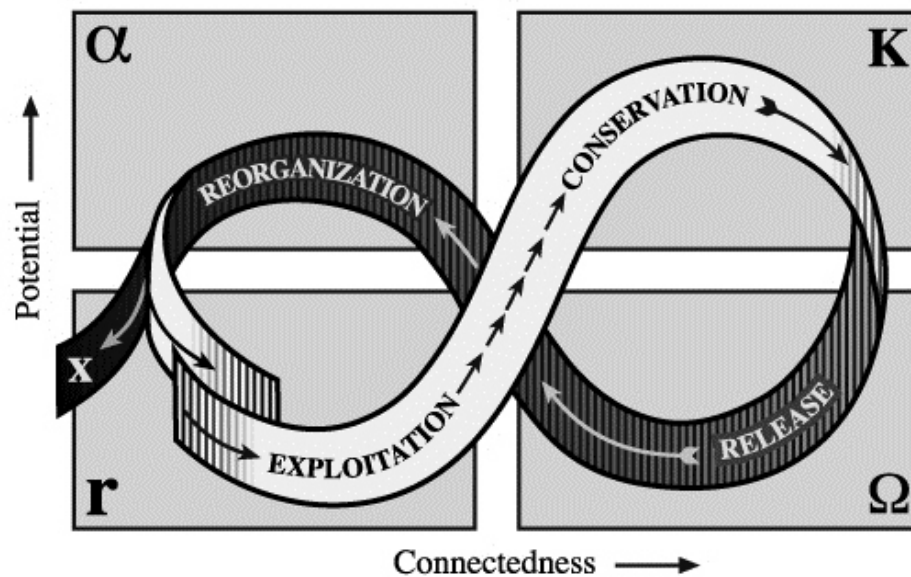


Figure 4. Stylized representation of four stages of the Adaptive Cycle. Retrieved from *Panarchy synopsis : understanding transformations in human and natural systems* (Kindle location 153) Gunderson, L. (2002). Washington: Island Press.

The adaptive cycle occurs in four phases: reorganization. Rapid growth, conservation, release. Most students in K-12 schools are introduced to this concept early in their education with the ecological concept of *succession*. However, in my experience, teachers rarely outline the cyclical nature of succession. Holling and Gunderson explain the phases by consistently revisiting the example of a maturing forest.

The **reorganization phase** is characterized by experimentation, innovation and uncertainty. New species populate the space, and seeds that had previously lied dormant in the soil can reappear. This particular stage can continue for long durations, as the future is somewhat uncertain and there is a multiplicity of possibilities.

In the **exploitation phase**, certain species begin to take over and capture more and more of the nutrients. Those that grow in this time are able to withstand the environmental variations that exist and begin to become more dependent on each other.

Towards the end of exploitation, the ecosystem transitions to the **conservation phase**, where dominant species “exploit” the most space and become more and more dependent on each other. Eventually, in nature, a very mature forest is composed primarily of old-growth trees that are extremely reliant on each other, and there is not likely to be much room in the ecosystem for other things to grow. Anyone who has taken a hike in an old forest can note the lack of other plants on the forest floor.

At the height of this conservation phase, because the forest is so interconnected, even a small disturbance can have great impact due to the lack of diversity. This lack of diversity results in a more rigid ecosystem and overall ability to adapt and respond to outside pressure decreases.

The **release phase** is started by a disturbance (like a bolt of lightning), which due to the low resilience in the system creates quick destruction of the previous order. In the forest example, a forest fire consumes the fuel that was bound up in the mature trees, and the interconnectedness of the roots and branches, assures that the fire will decimate many trees until it burns itself out, and the whole cycle starts again with reorganization (Gunderson & Holling, 2002).

In addition to the four-stage approach, outlined above, Gunderson, in a synopsis of his work, states that the cycle can also be viewed in two opposing stages, the “**front loop**” consisting of rapid growth and conservation, and “**back loop**” which includes release and renewal. Each loop has their own unique characteristics, the front being certainty and

growth, while the back loop is defined by uncertainty and rapid experimentation (Gunderson, 2002).

This natural cycle has interesting parallels and symmetry to the innovation and learning literature that I reviewed. Tushman's (2013) "exploration and exploitation" map onto the front and back loops of the adaptive cycle. In addition, the alignment between Argyris's (2002) single loop and double loop learning framework align as well. Single loop learning aligns with the "front loop" of the cycle where refining, exploiting, and certainty are characteristically present. The "back loop" of the personal learning cycle begins with a disturbance to the assumptions, and new learnings and assumptions result, which characteristically double-loop is learning.

Francis Westley applied the same cyclical nature to social organizations and innovation as well. Social organizations, much like forests, can also have a developmental arc characterized by rapid growth, conservation, release and renewal (Westley, 2006).

It is interesting and instructive to view Teach For America's history in light of these phases of natural systems, as there are many parallels to the history of the organization and these cycles of nature. The "dark years" could be described as the renewal phase, a time of uncertainty and a multiplicity of possibilities. The ensuing years were characterized by rapid growth and an increasingly conservative approach to managing the organization. This created a top-down and heavily centralized group of national teams that were very much the "mature trees" of the Teach For America forest. There was little resources left for new ideas and new organizational models. Since 2013, the dual disturbance of external backlash and internal pressures has created an organizational release of resources to regions and the organization finds itself back in a renewal and reorganizing type phase. The figure below

tracks the timeline of TFA through the various phases.

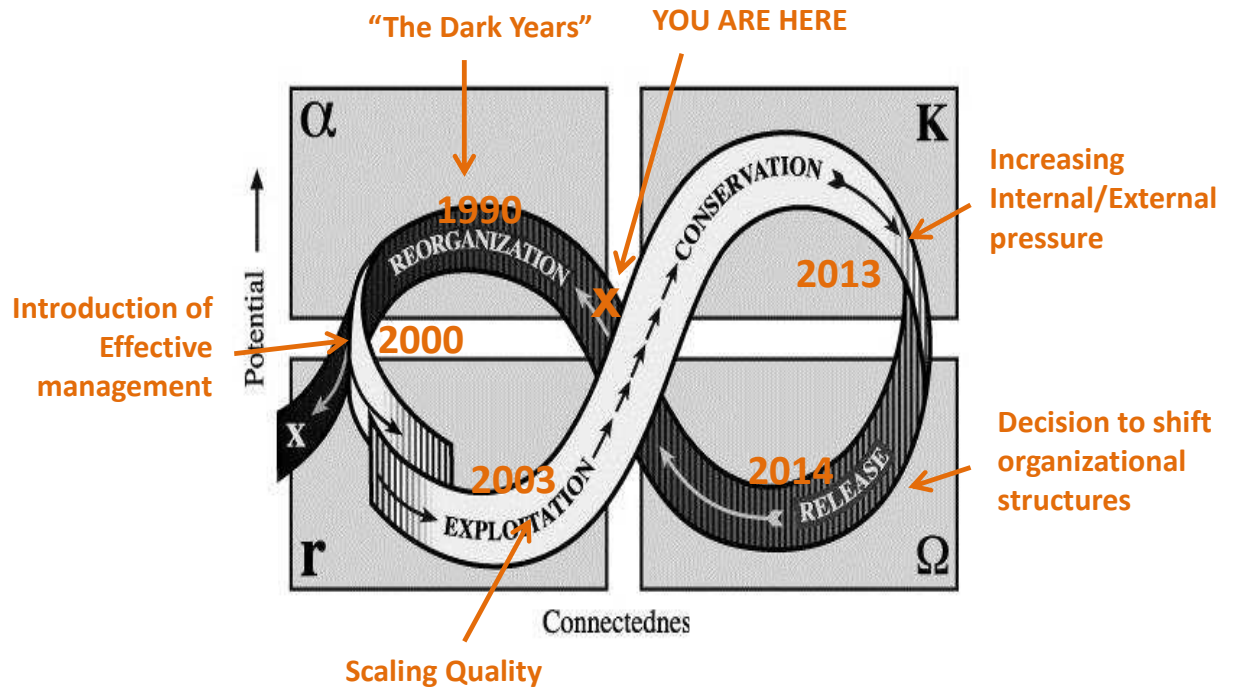


Figure 5. Teach For America's organizational timeline and history mapped onto a representation of four stages of the Adaptive Cycle. Retrieved and adapted from *Panarchy synopsis: understanding transformations in human and natural systems* (Kindle location 153) Gunderson, L. (2002). Washington: Island Press.

Developing the Learning Process: A Theory of Action

According to Patton, if one can map an organization's history and view it through the lens of this natural cycle, it is helpful in diagnosing what evaluation structures or processes need to be brought to the fore and will help dictate what processes need to be developed at any given time.

Summative evaluation (i.e. Validating a model) is best used during the conservation phase of a program, when the intervention model is set, and when a user group needs to decide whether to spread or redevelop the project. Formative evaluation (i.e. Evaluation for Improvement) is best used when piloting a model to revise and refine it prior to a more summative review. Developmental Evaluation is situated in the renewal phase of the cycle, best for exploring, creating and identifying emerging aspects of what a model may become (Patton, 2011).

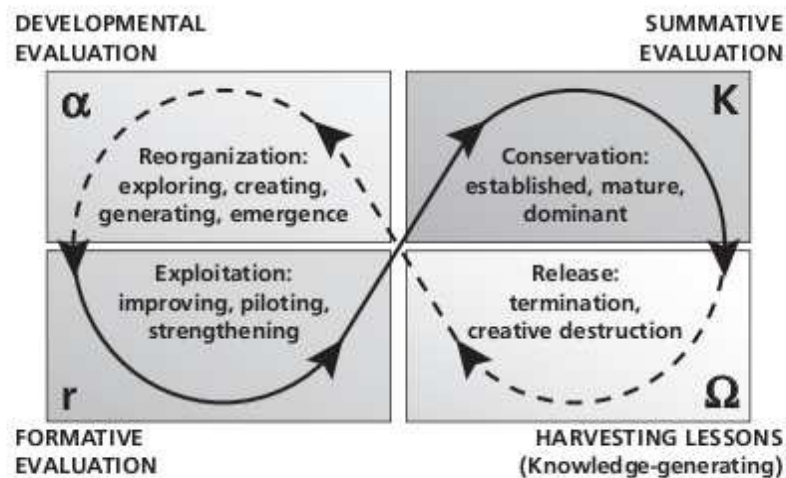


Figure 6. Evaluation types and the Adaptive Cycle. Retrieved from *Developmental evaluation : applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use* (p. 207), Patton, M. Q. (2011). New York: New York : Guilford Press, c2011.

After the diagnosis of the organization's history and current stage, and knowing that the innovative projects are fueling new regional ideas and developing new models, it is clear that the evaluation and learning processes needed in the organization are those that equate with double-loop learning. Therefore, my Theory of Action for creating learning processes for these innovative projects was inspired by developmental evaluation. If I can create the proper conditions, I will see indications of increased double-loop learning in the individuals and teams that I work with. More formally, my Theory of Action states:

If I create conditions for teams and innovators to have opportunities, tools, and valid information for ongoing reflective practice informed by a developmental evaluation approach,

Then these conditions will allow them to have more honest, open, dialogue, freedom of choice and risk taking that will allow them to be more adaptive in their changing regional and organizational contexts.

Project Description

Context: Residency Role

Beginning July 1, 2014, I began serving in the role of Senior Managing Director of Innovation and Organizational Learning at Teach for America on the Strategy, Innovation, and Organizational Development (SIOD) Team. This newly created role is charged with leading the creation and coordination of organization-wide innovation and learning processes in line with the evolving organizational structure.

I reported to Jeffrey Wetzler, Executive Vice President (EVP) of Strategy, Innovation, and Organizational Development. Jeff sat on the Leadership Team of Teach for America and he reported directly to the office of the Co-CEO. Jeff had been with Teach For America in various capacities since 2005. His most recent position prior to leading the SIOD team was EVP of Teacher, Support, Preparation and Development (TPSD) and Chief Learning Officer. Jeff served as my supervisor and mentor for the duration of the residency and the strategic project.

The SIOD team had three major work streams indicated by its cumbersome name, Strategy, Innovation, and Organizational Development. The team was less than two years old and was created as an intentionally “non-functional” team so that their three-fold charge could cross organizational teams and navigate the hierarchy of the growing organization. Both the Organizational Strategy and Development work was already underway and leading significant change efforts in the organization when I arrived. These changes were central to the organizations new direction and reorganization. The Strategy Sub-Team is working to shift strategic planning to a more emergent and dynamic process that allows for more strategic flexibility in the organization’s rapidly changing context. The Operating Model Sub-Team (Organizational Development) is working to shift organizational structures and

processes from a centrally managed approach to a more nationally supported, affiliative network of more autonomous regions. Prior to my arrival in July of 2014, the innovation and organizational learning work stream did not have any dedicated roles on the team and innovative work was largely embedded in the various functional teams. Below is a brief synopsis of major activities I engaged in (Strategic Project in bold).

Onboarding. I conducted approximately 40-50 interviews with current and past employees of the organization and external thought leaders. I also reviewed the major documents/digital sources that outline the core values and operations of the organization, paying special attention to the functional areas that coincide with my various streams of work. In addition to interviews and document review, I attended a two-day orientation/training at the New York Office that focused on Core Values, Mission, and Diversity.

Breakthrough Fund (Includes the Strategic Project in bold). I led all processes related to the internal innovation fund. Major activities I engaged in for this work were:

- Increased my knowledge and understanding of current application, selection, review and award processes for the internal competitive fund through interviews and document review.
- Ensured funding disbursement of awarded amounts, fiscal compliance and financial reporting for grantees and the overall fund.
- **Led a cross-functional group of national learning partners in the development of individual learning plans for funded innovation projects and the generation of individual and cumulative learnings of the innovative work for the Breakthrough Fund and its predecessor (See Context below).**

- Engaged in cultivation, grant writing, and external funder stewardship to ensure dedicated funding for the Breakthrough Fund.
- Developed the application, review, and selection processes for next round of funding (FY16).

Cataloguing and Coordinating Innovation Activities. Through multiple onboarding interviews and document reviews, I created an organization-wide record of current sources, pilots, and opportunities to highlight/share innovations across the organization. By engaging in a systematic review by functional team, catalogs of innovation catalysts and pilots were created. I generated insights for coordination opportunities to optimize current practices.

Innovation and Organizational Learning Research and Support. Another part of the work was researching and supporting innovation activities throughout the organization. For the duration of my time, I was charged with documenting innovation trends both inside and outside the organization. The major activities I performed related to this work were:

- Interviewed External Innovators to gather information about current trends in enterprise-wide innovation.
- Interviewed Internal Innovators to gather information about current innovation practices in the organization.
- Provided ad-hoc innovation consultancies to various staff members in the midst of innovative work.
- Designed and implemented workshops and conference events to highlight and demonstrate innovative activities and design thinking.

Team Related Work. The SIOD team has two other major work streams (strategy and operating model) and I met regularly with each of the owners of those work streams to identify and implement potential synergies in our respective work. The major activities I completed in team related work were:

- Drafted an emerging organization-wide strategy in the priority area of Innovation and Knowledge Sharing.
- Drafted implications for organizational structure based on external research and insights generated from internal innovation processes and structures.
- Provided support and short-term capacity strategic work for recruitment and admissions team that involved multiple interviews, research, retroactive analysis of successful initiatives, and the identification of challenges and recommendations for future strategic direction.
- Supported team development by engaging in individual check-ins and designing team building activities.

Spark Labs Development. I represented the team in order to develop a new lab (Spark Lab) for the development of solutions in the IT department. As part of this team, I aided in designing the lab's initial charge and related processes and protocols. We actively reviewed, refined, and launched ideas submitted to this internal group. I designed and co-facilitated design workshops for regions in order to surface regional challenges and insights that could inform and generate new ideas for incubation.

Context: Recent History of TFA's Competitive Funding for Regional Innovation

Innovation Challenge FY13. Teach for America's funding of innovative projects through competitive grants began in Fiscal Year 13 with the Innovation Challenge, when an

organizational surplus created a unique opportunity to fund innovative projects. Because the organization was moving toward a more decentralized model, they focused the funding regional innovation through a competitive grant. During this initial year, there were three broad priority areas (Transformational Change, Teaching as Leadership, Diversity) defined for the application process with loosely defined guidance and expectations for how the funding would be used. Ultimately, four projects out of 33 applications were granted funding and grantees began project implementation toward the end of FY13 and into FY14.

Organizational follow up on these projects was intended to be twofold. Firstly, there was follow up related to fiscal reporting obligations in order to ensure financial stewardship. Secondly, there was intent to support grantee development and project learnings through grantee meetings and workshops. In the first two years of project implementation, the organization met its financial reporting obligations, but there was little to no intentional organizational learning activities set up by the national organization.

Breakthrough Fund FY15. The national organization's continued commitment to innovation funding resulted in a second iteration of a regional grant called the Breakthrough Fund. This remained a competitive grant for regions funded from national revenue, but based on learnings from the first round of the fund; there were some changes to the application processes and the plan for follow-up. No priority areas were named so that possible solutions would not be stifled by the process itself. There were also plans for more intentionality in the application process and planned follow-up for guidance on funding and evaluation of the funded projects. Ultimately, by mid-July of 2015, 11 projects out of 34 applications were awarded funding, and a 12th project was awarded funding in October.

Strategic Project Description

I was charged with leading a cross-functional group of national learning partners in the developing a learning process for previously funded innovation projects.

Initial Exploration and Project Scoping. The first month of the project was spent in project onboarding activities. This consisted of multiple initial individual and group interviews and an exhaustive reading of pertinent materials and available documents. I also received all documentation from the first two application cycles and made sure to read all the applications and guidance documents for the funds.

I also conducted individual meetings with learning partners on three national teams (Alumni, Recruitment, and TPSD). Most of the projects had a logical partner based on the content of their innovation, and each of the national teams had agreed to provide capacity to follow these projects and capture the learnings. I initially met with managers and then conducted meetings with the national staff members that would be collecting data and reflections on the projects. The important outcome for these initial meetings was to ensure “national learning partners” were in place for each of the projects.

Developing Learning Plan Templates. In subsequent meetings and communication, I sought all learning and evaluation approaches for innovative projects that existed on the various functional teams. Based on this information, and through multiple touch points, I co-designed and achieved consensus on a preliminary template for a learning plan for funded projects. Figure 7 is the template of guiding questions that the learning partners used to create learning plans for each project (See Appendix C for more detailed template/worksheet):

Purpose	Key Questions	Outcomes of Interest	Comparison Groups	Methods
<p><i>What is hoped to be accomplished with this innovative project?</i></p> <p><i>What are the overarching goals?</i></p> <p><i>What are the hypotheses or theory of change?</i></p> <p><i>What do you hope to be different as a result of this pilot/innovation or what would be true for regions or participants who engaged in this program compared to those who didn't?</i></p>	<p><i>What questions need to be answered?</i></p> <p><i>Are there decisions to be made based on the answers to these questions?</i></p> <p><i>Who are the stakeholders that will need to be updated?</i></p> <p><i>What is the timeline for answering questions and updating stakeholders?</i></p> <p><i>Examples might include: hiring deadlines, interim pilot assessment, headcount planning deadline, final evaluation, etc.</i></p>	<p><i>What types of outcomes will be tracked to capture emerging learnings?</i></p> <p><i>What specific measures of success will be used to determine the impact of the innovation? Note: This should be directly tied to the hypotheses and theory of change described in section 1 "purpose."</i></p> <p><i>What interim measures can be collected along the way to help you understand the progress of your innovation and give real-time feedback on if/ how to change direction?</i></p>	<p><i>Is there a subset of individuals in the region who will be "receiving" the innovation?</i></p> <p><i>How many participants will you have?</i></p> <p><i>Is there a comparison group identified?</i></p> <p><i>How many are in the comparison group?</i></p>	<p><i>How will you collect the data for outcomes (e.g., survey questions, focus groups, observations)?</i></p> <p><i>How will interim data be used to reflect on process and progress?</i></p> <p><i>What will the stakeholders need to see in the results to determine next steps? Note: For innovations involving 30 or fewer participants, use of quantitative methods and data may be limited; therefore, the use of qualitative data (e.g., interviews/focus groups/case studies) might be more helpful.</i></p>

Figure 7. Breakthrough Fund learning plan template and guiding questions.

Developing Individual learning plans. Once I had normed the national learning partners around the template sufficient to capture the varied learnings on each of the innovative projects, I held initial meetings with the national learning partners and regional project leads. These meetings were facilitated by the national learning partners and guided by the templates/guiding questions themselves and the meetings were a guided discussion for the purposes of creating a draft learning plan. Following these meetings, I followed up with the national learning partner to ensure a draft learning plan was created.

While, in most cases, regional projects had a designated national learning partner, one of the FY15 funded initiatives did not fall within the content covered by a national

functional team. There were also projects funded in the initial year (FY13) that were in full implementation or had already completed activities related to the project. For these projects (five total), I operated as the national learning partner. The unique stage of the already running projects (four total) allowed me to try some different approaches to developing the learning plan.

- In two cases where projects were already being implemented, I decided to propose a more emerging and reflective approach to developing the plans. I started by having them reflect on their initial application and proposed activities, and track the changes that had already occurred in their project. In this way, we could get an update on the project's progress, but also unpack what was continuing to emerge as important in the work and introduce some questions to examine for the work going forward. I tracked these conversations by creating a series of updated logic models for the project (see Appendix D).
- In the other cases, I offered my support in helping them learn from what they were doing. I left the nature of the relationship up to them, and made sure to be available to them, as the support was needed. As the support questions came, I began to create a plan based on the nature of the questions they were asking and decisions they were trying to make and ultimately proposed a draft that tracked with the learning plan template.

Regardless of the approach (typical initial questions, logic modeling, or user-driven), the ultimate outcome was a learning plan draft. Through iterative emails, the national learning partner, the region, and I arrived at an agreed upon approach to learning from the

project. In some cases, this took multiple back and forth, but in all cases, the plan was agreed upon and activities towards methods and data collection were allowed to commence. I worked to ensure that all learning plans included a follow-up reflective meeting (StepBack). This guaranteed that multiple opportunities would be available for group reflection, and that once information was gathered, and the project was underway, we would have opportunities to capture and reflect on the ever-evolving projects. Below is an example of a finalized learning plan for an innovative project based on the learning plan template.

Purpose	Key Questions	Outcomes of Interest	Comparison Groups	Methods
We hope to leverage a local external partnership organization to make new investments in culturally responsive teacher training and development	<p>Do the quarterly courses impact teacher actions (in particular cultural proficiency and affirmation)?</p> <p>What experiences drive that impact?</p> <p>What factors influence participation in the courses? "</p>	<p>Cultural competency as measured by course reader created by partner.</p> <p>Student surveys (instrument still in design)</p> <p>Lesson plans and student artifacts</p> <p>Number of CMs who engage in multiple courses</p>	<p>15 Corps Members (CM) opted into Q1</p> <p>19 CMs opted into Q2 (10 returners from Q1!)</p> <p>X CMs opted into Q3</p> <p>X CMs opted into Q4</p> <p>Comparison group: Non-participating regional CMs</p>	<p><i>Measuring impact.</i> Compile and synthesize data outlined in outcomes of interest.</p> <p><i>Surfacing factors that drive impact.</i> Quarterly CM focus groups following each of the quarterly courses to understand what they are taking away from the course, what about the experience feels most beneficial, if they plan on going to the next course(s), and why CMs opt-in or opt-out of this experience.</p> <p>Quarterly StepBack with region to capture reflections on the partnership and to share findings.</p>

Figure 8. Example of finalized Breakthrough Fund learning plan.

Conducting Project StepBacks. After the learning plans were developed, the next official meeting that occurred with the grantees was the grantee stepback. These meetings were specifically designed to capture grantee reflections on how it was going, reflect on initial data gathered and hear next steps planned in the project implementation. These meetings were heavily guided by a meeting agenda and previously shared question prompts

(See Email Excerpt Below). In some cases, they were facilitated by the national partner, and in other cases, (when partners were not available) I facilitated the meetings. I made written records of these meetings, and in the few instances where I could not attend, the learning partner sent me detailed notes.

...Below are some questions we've been using as we meet with innovators in their work. Hoping we can use these to guide our conversation tomorrow. These are certainly not the end all be all, but hopefully will help to capture some insights from you in the work that you are engaged in. XXX and I have also both looked over the report you sent in a few weeks ago, and I'm sure your answers will be excellent jumping off points for engaging with the prompts below. Talk soon!!

Quick Intros/Check-in

Project Update

- How's it going, what's the latest update on the project?
- Where are you all in the work compared to where you expected to be?

Project Launch

- What was your approach or what steps have you taken to "get this off the ground?" What led you to take those steps (or what factors were you considering that led you to take those steps or make those choices)?

Wins/Challenges/Surprises

- What were your big wins in the first few months? How do you know? What factors led to those big wins?
- What were your biggest challenges? Were there any big surprises? If so, what were they? What factors led to those challenges or surprises?
- Given those wins and challenges/surprises, what would you do next time? Tomorrow? Next month? next year?

Data/Metrics

- What trends does your most recent recruitment data surface and how does/doesn't that match what you're seeing on the ground? Do you think you are collecting the right data? What other data/metrics do you think would help you learn more about the impact of the work you are doing?

Now what?

- What's top of mind for you now? What's on the horizon?

Figure 9. Excerpt of email with protocol of guiding questions used in Stepback conversations with innovation project leads.

Continued Learning Team Activities. After the learning plan development and initial StepBacks, learning activities continued between grantees and learning team partners. The specific activities were and are largely dependent on the pace of implementation of the project and learning plans that were in place. Activities related to the processes included:

Additional StepBacks, quantitative and qualitative data gathering on project activities and impact, and support related to individual grantee questions and upcoming grantee decisions.

In December, an update document was prepared to outline the progress and high level summary learnings related to the various projects and preliminary insights from data gathered (See Appendix E)

While the various learning team and project-related activities continue, for the purposes of the Capstone document, an artificial ending of the strategic project was set in Early January, and the results and analysis of the results are generally restricted to the activities in this timeframe.

Results

Results of Project Progress and Process

In order to generate insights on the process for the strategic project, I collected data on intended timeline, activities, outputs and outcomes and compared these to actual project timeline, activities, outputs, and outcomes between July 2014 and January 2015. A summary of these results is presented in the tables on the following two pages.

Month	Activity Description	Outputs	Outcomes
July & August	Onboarding activities, initial individual and group interviews and website, application document analysis.	Interview Notes, Project Logic Models	Increased understanding of organizational context and funded projects.
September	Convening learning partners on various national teams for initial meetings to ensure “learning partners” are in place for each of the projects and	Meeting Notes, Personal Communications	Consensus on how we will “approach the work”
October	Leading/Facilitating the development of evaluation and learning plans for each of the funded projects	Individual Project Learning Plans	Alignment of learning plans to agreed upon approach.
October	Leading/Facilitating the ideation and development of prototypes for capturing learning from project grantee sites with learning partners	Archive of prototypes and project schedule.	Alignment of approach, plans and resultant prototypes.
November	Leading/Facilitating the implementation of prototype structures in “project StepBacks” between project grantees and learning partners	Stepback Reports	Learnings from prototypes and perceived value of process and product from stakeholders.
January	Leading/Facilitating second round of prototype structures in “project StepBacks”	Stepback Reports	Learnings from prototypes and perceived value of process and product from stakeholders.
Ongoing	Gathering survey and interview feedback from project grantees, learning partners, selected non-participating regions, and other identified stakeholders regarding the previous application rounds and current processes	Interview/Document Notes, Survey results, Personal Communications	Increased trust and greater understanding of innovation practices.
January	Generating Preliminary Insights from data gathered	Summary Slide Deck	Increased organizational understanding of project.

Figure 10. Outline of intended timeline, activities, outputs and outcomes for the strategic project.

Month	Activity Description	Outputs	Outcomes
July & August	Onboarding activities, initial individual and group interviews and website, application document analysis.	Interview Notes, Project Logic Models	Increased understanding of organizational context and funded projects.
September	Individual meetings with learning partners on three national teams (Alumni, Recruitment, TPSD) for initial meetings to ensure “learning partners” are in place for each of the projects.	Meeting Notes, Personal Communications	Understanding how each partner approaches their work currently.
October	Discovery and explication of existing learning plan components for innovative projects.	Meeting notes, personal communication, guiding component and questions template	Explicit and common learning plan components
October	Participating in the development of evaluation and learning plans for each of the funded projects	Individual Project Learning Plans	Alignment of learning plans to components.
October	Capturing, monitoring, various prototypes for reflective practice with project grantees.	Meeting Notes and Personal Communications.	Categorization of emergent prototypes.
November-December	Participating in emergent prototype structures in “project StepBacks” between project grantees and learning partners	Stepback Notes	Learnings from prototypes and perceived value of process and product from stakeholders.
November-January	Development of the next round’s application and learning plan processes informed by insights from feedback on application process and external funders expectations	Application Materials, Learning Plan	Increase in innovative behavior of grantees. Increase in perceived value of organizational learning processes.
December	Generating document to outline progress of various projects and preliminary insights from data gathered.	Summary document	Increased organizational understanding of grantee progress and projects.
January	Continued participation and facilitation of initial and subsequent “project StepBacks”.	Stepback Notes	Learnings from prototypes and perceived value of process and product from stakeholders.
Ongoing	Gathering survey and interview feedback from project grantees, learning partners, selected non-participating regions, and other identified stakeholders regarding the previous application rounds and current processes	Interview/Document Notes, Survey results, Personal Communications	Increased trust and understanding of innovation enablers/barriers.

Figure 10. Outline of actual timeline, activities, outputs and outcomes for the strategic project.

Results of Project Impact

In order to measure the impact of the project, it is necessary to operationalize the measurement of the results in the second part of the Theory of Action:

...then these conditions will allow them to have more honest, open, dialogue, freedom of choice and risk taking that will allow them to be more adaptive in their changing regional contexts.

Because of the short time frame of the project, it was not feasible to measure whether the conditions created by the new learning structures are leading to behaviors in the organization. Instead of measuring for behaviors themselves, I chose to concentrate on gathering data on leading indicators for these in scheduled meetings that occurred through the duration of the project. In many organizations, scheduled meetings do not tell the entire story, but in this virtual setting, there are far less informal interactions, and the majority of the discussions take place in scheduled meetings, so the meetings seem to be a suitable unit for measurement.

Based on Argyris' work, honest, open dialogue, freedom of choice and risk-taking are a result of an organization's ability to engage in "double-loop learning" (Argyris, 1999).

Therefore, in order to measure whether individuals/teams might show indications of these capabilities, I chose to focus on the types of immediate verbal responses to interactions with introduced errors. In order to gather the data, I coded a three-part dichotomous rubric for each scheduled interaction. The prompts are below and an example is included:

1. TRUE/FALSE. During the course of the interaction, an error/mismatch introduced related to the project or subject being discussed.

This indicates whether there was a moment in the meeting where someone introduced something “wrong”, an error or a mismatch between intended and actual results.

2. TRUE/FALSE. The immediately stated response to the error was characterized as single-loop learning.

Single loop responses are typified by suggesting changes to activities or strategies in the project without necessarily questioning assumptions or reframing.

3. TRUE/FALSE. The immediately stated response to the error was characterized by double-loop learning.

Double loop responses are typified by public testing of assumptions and beliefs, or questioning the framing of the project and its context.

Example #1

11/17/2014 - Grantee Stepback

During a stepback conversation with an innovative recruiter for a rural region, the mismatch of the stated goals for total QC's (quality candidates) to date and actual QC's was presented. The total was significantly lower than expected. The immediate verbal responses to this error was both an articulation of a new strategy to optimize execution (give candidates more practice with interviewing), followed by a long discussion of TFA's selection model and whether it is still biased towards students on these emerging campuses, and whether a better strategy might be to take over selection at the regional level.

Resultant Coding for this meeting:

ERROR INTRODUCED: TRUE

SINGLE LOOP RESPONSE: TRUE

DOUBLE LOOP RESPONSE: TRUE

Figure 11. Coding example for Grantee StepBack meeting.

Example #2**11/13/2014 –Design Session Feedback**

During a planning meeting for an upcoming conference presentation, another staff member and I were incorporating feedback from test users on our session agenda. Error was introduced as test users had given multiple points of feedback, and me and my co-designer's immediate response was to make several small adjustments to the session agenda based on that feedback.

Resultant Coding for this meeting:

ERROR INTRODUCED: TRUE

SINGLE LOOP RESPONSE: TRUE

DOUBLE LOOP RESPONSE: FALSE

Figure 12. Coding example of design session feedback meeting.

The various meeting context variables and the outcome variables with definitions are described in the figure below:

Variables	
Date	Continuous variable representing the date of the meeting or scheduled interaction.
Primary Purpose	Categorical nominal variable designating purpose of meeting
Originating Team	Categorical nominal variable designating the team that originated the meeting.
Other Invited National Team/s	Categorical nominal Variable that designates other teams whose representatives were invited to meeting.
Primary Work stream	Categorical nominal variable that designates the primary work stream associated with the meeting.
Meeting Duration	Continuous variable of scheduled duration of meeting.
BF Learning Team Process	Categorical dichotomous variable that reflects whether meeting was a designed structure of the cross-functional learning team.
Coded Outcome Variables	
Error Introduced	Dichotomous variable that reflects whether project errors or mismatches were introduced in the meeting
Single Loop Immediate Response	Dichotomous variable that reflects whether a “single loop” immediate response was noted by resident. Single loop responses are typified by changes to project activities and strategies.
Double Loop Immediate Response	Dichotomous variable that reflects whether a “double loop” immediate response was noted by resident. Double loop responses are typified by public testing of assumptions or beliefs related to the project and its processes.

Figure 13. Definition of meeting context and outcome variables generated for each interaction.

These interactions were coded for each of the over 300 interactions inclusive of the various work streams in the residency role (See Table 1).

Table 1

Excerpt of raw data containing meeting variables inclusive of coded outcomes.

Date	Primary Purpose	Originating Team	Other Invited	Primary Work stream	Meeting Duration	BF Learning Team Process	Error Introduced	Single Loop Immediate Response	Double Loop Immediate Response
9/16	Learning Plan Development	56	88	Breakthrough Fund	0:30	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
9/16	Exploration	1	88	IOL Research and Support	1:00	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
9/16	Introduction	1	3	Onboarding	0:30	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
9/16	Project Meeting	4	88	Spark Labs	1:00	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE

To determine whether I had created the conditions intended in my Theory of Action, I included a meeting variable that stated whether the interaction was a learning structure set forth by my strategic project. In theory, by coding the structures set up by the Breakthrough Fund Learning Team, I could see the difference in the indicators for learning that resulted from these conditions. If these structures are successful, then I expected to see a higher percentage of double-loop responses to errors than the other work streams, as breakthrough learning structures were designed to ensure that innovators were engaging in the back-loop practices required for adaptation.

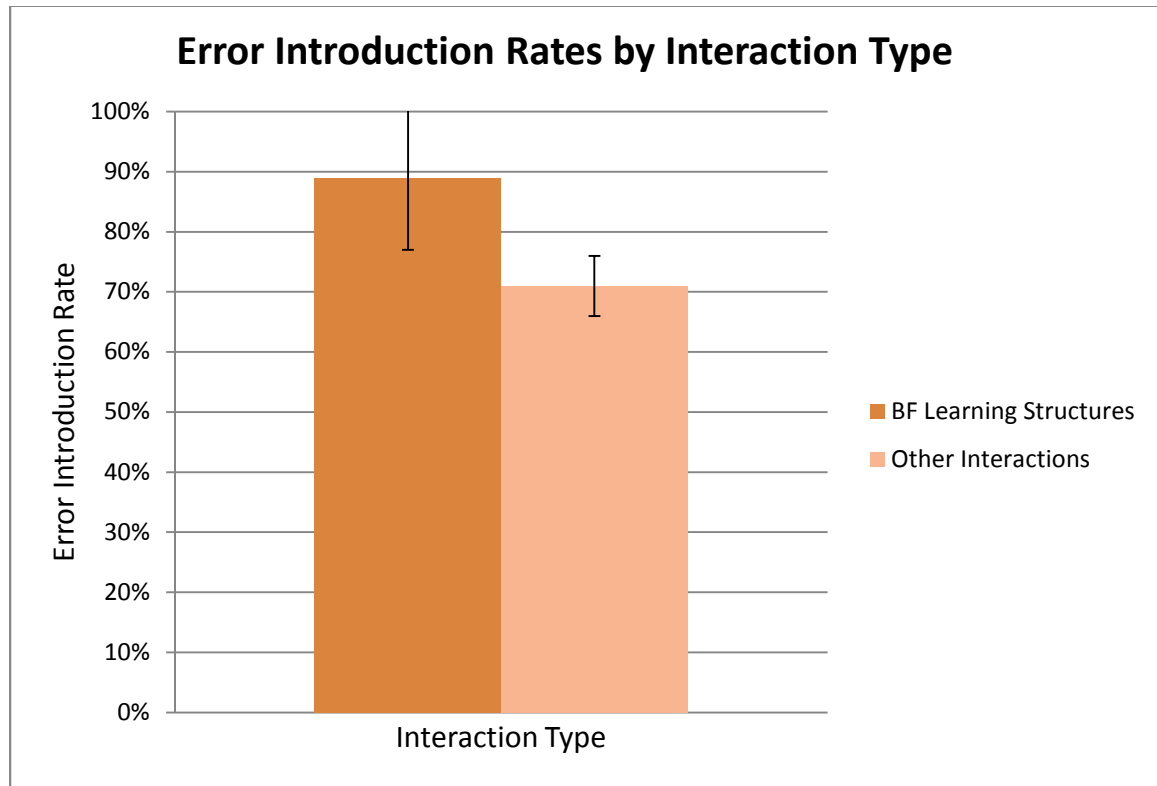


Figure 14. Rate of error introduction in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions.

Table 2

Rate of introduced errors in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions.

Interaction Type	N	Mean	[95% Confidence Interval]	
BF Learning Structures	28	89%	77%	101%
Other Interactions	300	71%	66%	76%

$p=.04$

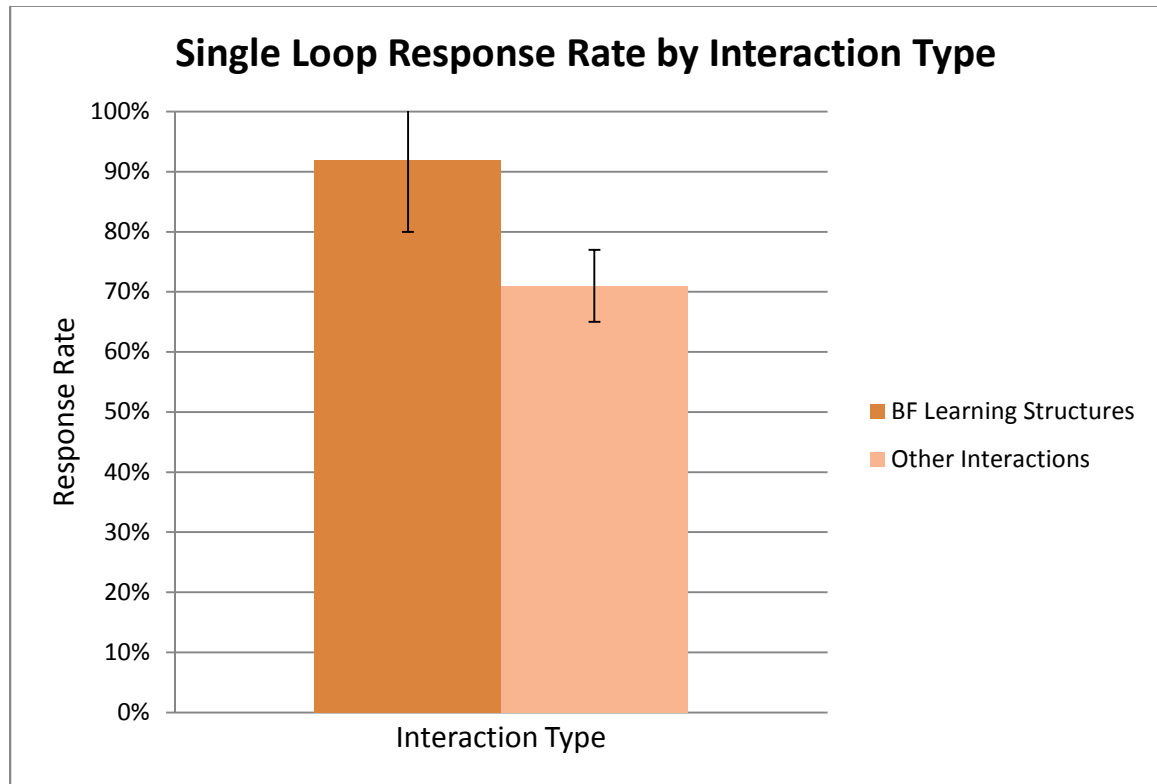


Figure 15. Rate of single-loop immediate responses in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions.

Table 3

Rate of single-loop immediate responses in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions where error was introduced.

Interaction Type	N	Mean	[95% Confidence Interval]	
BF Learning Structures	25	92%	80%	104%
Other Interactions	213	71%	65%	77%

$p=.02$

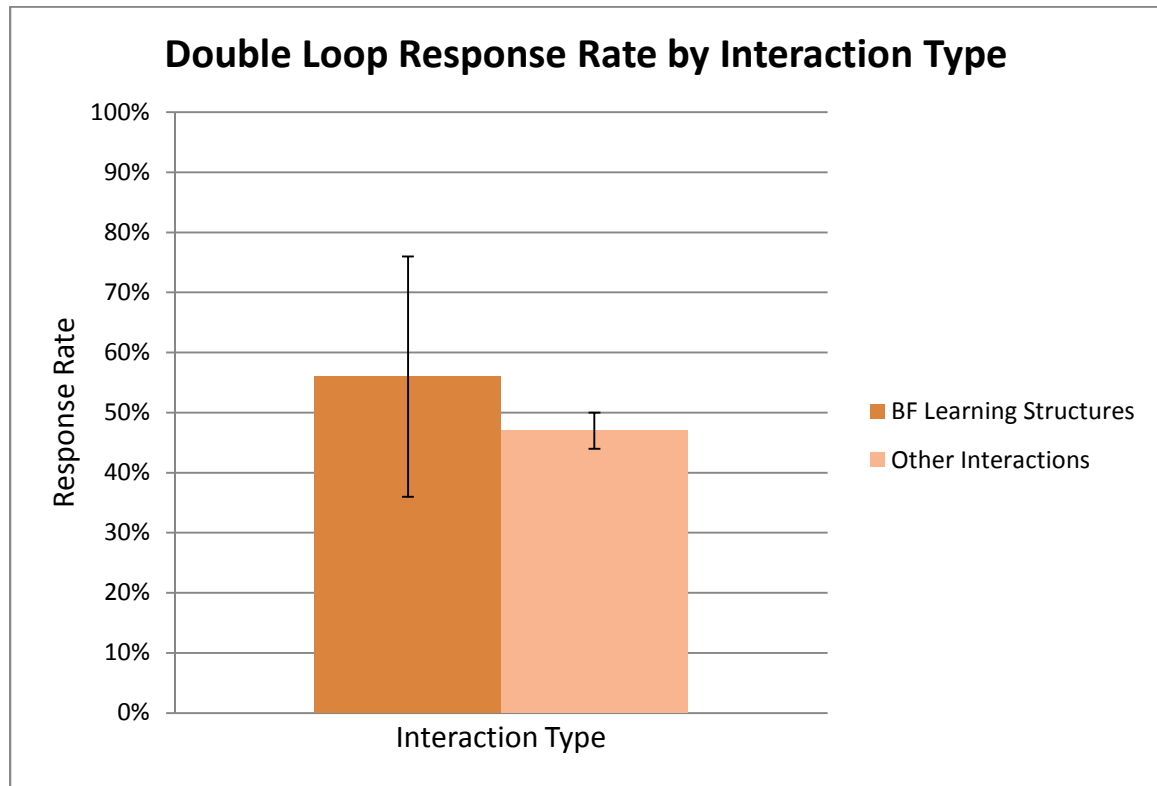


Figure 16. Rate of double-loop immediate responses in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions.

Table 4

Rate of double-loop immediate responses in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions where error was introduced.

Interaction Type	N	Mean	[95% Confidence Interval]	
BF Learning Structures	25	56%	36%	76%
Other Interactions	213	47%	44%	50%
$p=.37$				

Tests of Significance

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare error introductions between breakthrough learning processes and other interactions. There was a significant difference in the error introduction rates for the breakthrough processes ($M=.89$, $SD=.31$) and other interactions ($M=.71$, $SD=.45$); $t(326) = -2.08$, $p = 0.04$. These results suggest that breakthrough learning processes are associated with a higher probability for the introduction of error in the interactions.

In addition, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare single loop responses between breakthrough learning processes and other interactions when an error had been introduced. There was a significant difference in the rates for the breakthrough processes ($M=.92$, $SD=.28$) and other interactions ($M=.71$, $SD=0.46$); $t(236) = -2.27$, $p = 0.02$. These results suggest that the breakthrough learning processes are associated with higher probability for single loop responses when an error is introduced.

Finally, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare double loop responses between breakthrough learning processes and other interactions when an error had been introduced. There was not a significant difference in the rates for the breakthrough processes ($M=.56$, $SD=.51$) and other interactions ($M=.46$, $SD=0.50$); $t(236) = -.90$, $p = 0.36$. These results suggest that the presence of breakthrough learning processes were not associated with the likelihood for double loop responses when an error was introduced.

Analysis

Assumptions and Limitations

Before beginning the analysis section, it is important to note the assumptions and limitations in the results that were gathered and subsequent analysis. In a strictly empirical study, there is a clear separation between researcher and interventionist. This belies the intent of a practice-based capstone project that necessarily combines these roles. Any reading of the prior results and following analysis should always be qualified with the understanding that my individual presence and leadership throughout the meetings certainly had an impact on the results. Additional reflections on my own leadership qualities and decisions that most certainly had an effect on the outcomes can also be found in the “Implications for Self” section later in the capstone.

In addition, I designed the data collection method used for its ability to collect and reflect in practice. While informally validated through various conversations with fellow meeting participants, no formal validation of the construct or method should be assumed. The decision to collect leading indicators as opposed to future behaviors, while useful for informing decisions in practice, may not fully reflect actual behaviors and decisions that resulted. For the purposes of the analysis, I am making an explicit assumption that immediate responses are associated with learning behaviors.

The following analysis is an attempt to explain these results through research, and necessarily includes aspects and anecdotes from my own lived experience leading in the organization. Whenever possible, I use examples and citations to illustrate and support my assertions. However, due to scope of my work, my limited timeframe, and my own biases, my phenomenological analysis should not be conflated with empirical research.

Introduction to Analysis

The analysis section is split into three major sections. The first two are an analysis of whether I achieved what was intended in my Theory of Action. The first section is a discussion/analysis of whether conditions were created, and the second whether the results achieved a leading indication of an increase in behaviors associated with double loop learning on the innovative teams. This section also involves a brief discussion of mechanisms that may have contributed to what is seen in the overall data. The final section of the analysis introduces a few analytical frames in order to provide explanatory power and reasons behind the project successes and challenges. StepBacks

Section 1: Did I successfully create the conditions?

If I create conditions for teams and innovators to have opportunities, tools, and valid information for ongoing reflective practice...

The first part of the Theory of Action explicates three characteristic outputs of successful condition- creating (opportunities, tools, and valid information). Below is an analysis of whether the strategic project was successful in creating these characteristics. The scale that is applied is a three option scale describing to what extent the specific characteristic was met: Not Met, Partially Met, and Met). The condition-creating generally occurred through the structures of learning plan development and stepback meetings; where noted, the characteristics are examined through these two different structures.

Opportunities: Partially Met

Time Allocated. For each funded project, the grantee's project lead, national learning partners, and I had two successive one-hour meetings for learning plan development and reflective stepback separated by a few months. While length of meetings was insufficient at times, they were well attended and in general stayed on topic the entire time. In almost all cases, the meetings were followed up with a round of emails and next steps were consistently laid out and follow-through was generally accomplished.

Team Attendance. The second component of opportunity that leads me to give it a "partially met rating" was the limitations that were created because the entire team that was working on the innovative project was rarely present. There was a multiplicity of opportunities and perspectives lost because of that. Both the national learning partner and I had to rely on the singular perspective of the project manager to engage in the development of the learning plan and the StepBacks, and this limited the conversation to the assumptions and biases present in their perspective. The quality of the conversation and reflection was dependent on one person's perceptions and capabilities.

Tools: Condition Partially Met.

The primary tool used for learning plan development was the template we devised to guide the process. This particular template was the guide that informed the plan, however it was not used as an actual meeting protocol during the learning plan development process. The meetings served as both an introductory call and overview of the project from the grantee's perspective. We, as learning partners, took that information, and with some remaining targeted questions were able to fill out the initial learning plan draft.

There were instances where tools were more explicitly used by the innovators. In two cases during the learning plan development process, I used the application as a tool for

reflection and learning plan development, and the application with guiding questions served to highlight the variation between intended and actual project implementation, and was a more robust usage of tools than the primary process for learning plan development. The stepback meetings, too, had very explicit agendas and questions, and the grantees interacted with and responded to them in all of the stepback conversations.

Valid Information: Condition Partially Met

The third essential intended characteristic was to ensure that practitioners were operating with valid information. Again, I believe this condition was partially met through my strategic project and the split again falls under the difference between the Learning Development Plans and the StepBacks, which were the two major interactions in the work. In the learning development stage, the information was limited to the perception of the innovator, and in the absence of deep data collection, the conversations were largely around how to collect data in the future. The only data we did have in those initial meetings was filtered through the perceptions of the project manager and the validity of it was largely dependent on their perspective. The learning partner and I did not question much in those initial meetings in order to test assumptions and validity of their perceptions. In the StepBacks, however, we knew their original hopes for the work and had preliminary data on both the outcomes and the project's progress. The innovative project leads had many opportunities to reflect on the mismatch between their intentions and reality and it provided for a much richer conversation.

Section 2: Did the project achieve the desired outcomes?

...then these conditions will allow them to have more honest, open, dialogue, freedom of choice and risk taking that will allow them to be more adaptive in their changing regional contexts.

Revisiting Argyris' work, honest, open dialogue, freedom of choice and risk-taking are a result of an organization's ability to engage in "double-loop learning". Therefore, in order to achieve the results I had hoped for, I chose to focus on the types of immediate verbal responses to interactions where errors were introduced. In theory, if successful, I would have seen a higher rate of "learning moments" in the Breakthrough Fund Learning Processes. Specifically, I was hoping to see a higher rate of "double-loop" responses to the introduction of error during these meetings when compared to other meetings in which I participated or attended. Because these innovative projects are more likely in the renewal/reorganization phase, and because they are seen as possible catalysts for change as the organization transitions, these back-loop learning indicators should be occurring at higher rates in our learning processes.

In general, based on the results gathered, the learning processes were associated with higher rates of introduced error and single loop learning; however, I could not conclude that they were associated with the most important indicator: double loop responses. The 56% rate for Breakthrough Learning Processes, while higher than the other interactions (46%), was not statistically different when one accounts for the error. The large error is generally due to the smaller number of interactions that were present, and further observations at similar rates might have generated statistically significant results.

However, simply attributing the lack of significance to limited observations does not fully explain the still rather low percentage of double loop response rates, and understanding the mechanisms that led to these low rates is very important. When the Breakthrough Learning Processes are further broken down, we see the following results related to double loop response rates.

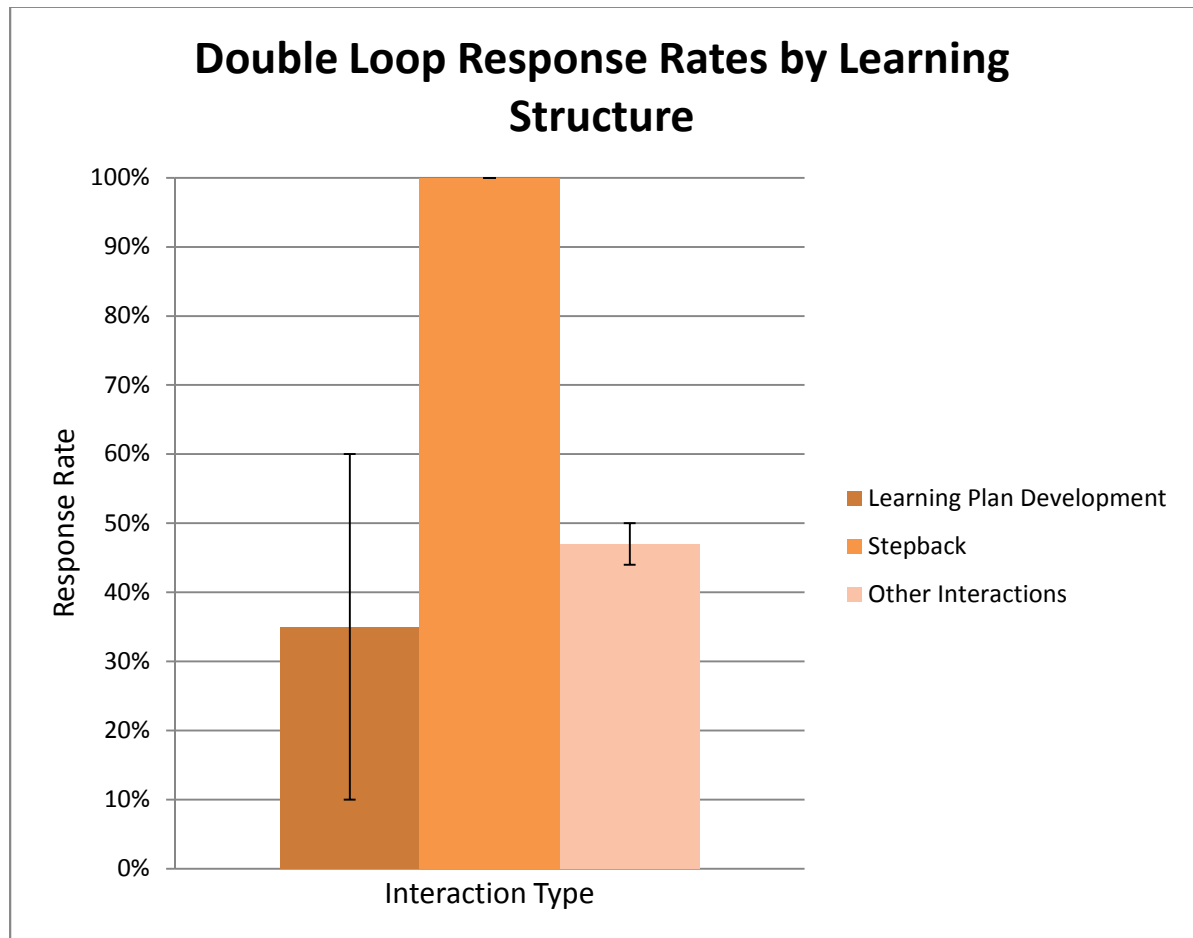


Figure 17. Rate of double-loop immediate responses in breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions.

Table 5

Rate of double-loop immediate responses in various breakthrough learning structures compared to all other interactions where error was introduced.

Interaction Type	N	Mean	[95% Confidence Interval]	
Learning Plan Development	17	35%	10%	61%
StepBacks	9	100%	100%	100%
Other Interactions	213	47%	44%	50%

The differences in the results related to the two learning structures are stark.

StepBacks produced double loop response significantly higher than the other recorded interactions; however, there is not a statistically significant difference between the learning plan development processes and the other interactions. This is suggestive evidence that the stepback structure is associated with higher double-loop responses. A likely explanation for the stark difference in the two structures was the higher presence of tools and valid information that occurred in the StepBacks (see conditions created). While I do not have sufficient evidence to attribute significance or causality to these differences, it is consistent with the Theory of Action that these conditions would predict a higher likelihood of double loop responses and ultimately lead to capabilities more consistent with the renewal phase. I should also note that organizationally, meetings called StepBacks are more naturally associated with testing assumptions and disciplined reflection than other meeting types, which certainly may have played a role as well.

Section 3: Further Analysis

Introduction of Edmonson's Analytical Frame. Amy Edmonson et. al (2008) provides a useful frame for understanding this strategic project in its organizational context. Based on her twenty years of studying knowledge organizations, she offers two different

constructs for execution that an organization and its management systems may employ:

Execution as Efficiency and Execution as Learning. She argues that organizations organized to execute for efficiency will have trouble executing for learning. Figure 18 lists the characteristics of each type of execution:

Execution as Efficiency	Execution as Learning
Leaders Provide Answers	Leaders set direction and articulate the mission.
Employees Follow Directions	Employees (usually in teams) discover the answers.
Optimal work processes are designed and set up in advance.	Tentative work processes are set up as a starting point
New work processes are developed infrequently and implementing change is a huge undertaking.	Work processes keep developing; small changes—experiments and improvements—are a way of life.
Feedback is typically one-way (from boss to employee) and corrective (“You’re not doing it right.”)	Feedback is always two-way: The boss gives feedback in the form of coaching and advice; team members give feedback about what they’re learning from doing the (ever-changing) work.
Problem-solving is rarely required, judgment is not expected, employees ask managers when they are unsure.	Problem solving is constantly needed, so valuable information is provided to guide employees’ judgment.
Fear is often a part of the work environment and generally doesn’t hamper the execution; in fact, it may help to motivate mundane tasks.	Fear cripples the learning process: It inhibits experimentation, lowers awareness of options, and discourages people from sharing and analyzing insights, questions, and problems.

Figure 18. Execution as efficiency vs execution as learning comparison chart. Adapted from *The competitive imperative of learning* (p. 4) Edmondson, A. C. (2008). *Harvard Business Review*, 86(7/8), 60.

The Organizational Context: Executing for Efficiency. Teach for America is espousing a shift in its organizational structures and processes. It is shifting from an organization designed for rapid, quality growth using a nationally managed structure to an organizational model of reduced growth and characterized by a nationally supported network of more autonomous regions, in order to maximize impact through responsiveness

to the various regional contexts. This change is just beginning, and the behavior and attitudes in the organization are still very much governed by its historical structures and processes.

The strategic project that I led unfolded in this larger organizational context.. In addition to my own leadership style and partial execution of the strategy, Edmonson's theory states that a lack of success on learning outcomes may also be attributed to the organizational context. If Teach For America has historically been organized to execute for efficiency, new learning processes would be harder to implement due to organizational headwinds. Below is a brief discussion of the various aspects of the organizational history and wheEdmonson's framework

Leaders provided answers and optimal processes. Historically at Teach for America, the national team often provided answers through systematizing tasks and a focus on adherence to the model. Decisions were made on the national team, and the majority of these organizational processes went from the national team to the regions for execution. A very good example of that was the growth strategy. Historically, corps size allocation and regional growth was a nationally driven process. Another example of leaders providing answers was the matrix structure (the belt and suspenders approach). This structure was to ensure that quality was maintained and variability was reduced. This was an absolutely necessary support, as the organization was growing rapidly and leadership in the regions were largely new to their roles, but one could definitely see how the structure enhanced the regional perception that there was a "right way" to do this work.

Problem solving. Due to its aggressive growth, more and more young leaders were stepping into a fast-paced, complex, situations. The national teams were heavily involved in solving regional problems. In a recent report put out by Bellwether Partners (2015), Elisa

Villanueva Beard stated that while not intended, the focus of the national/regional relationship became solving regional problems rather than building regional capacity and as a result, the people in the center of the organization increasingly became the knowledge hub of the organization. Historically, successful ED's were often promoted to national positions, as well, and there were even times when the central team would have to step in and take on roles or discrete tasks themselves (Mead et. al, 2015). It is evident that valuable information was concentrated in the center and therefore, historically speaking, would have been very difficult for a region to solve problems as they did not have all the information.

Feedback. Another area of focus for Teach for America was feedback. Because they were gathering performance data all the time, there were multiple opportunities for feedback. This took place in the meeting structures (Check-ins and Stepbacks) employed by the organization where progress toward goals and data could be reflected upon. In these meetings, new strategies and activities were set, and the employees could then resume their work with the new insights from their managers. The employee's goals and performance toward the goal was top priority, and feedback in these relationships was typically focused on the goals set by the employee and the data related to those goals. Reflection and ideation was concentrated on achieving progress toward the employee's goal, so naturally the nature of the feedback centered on the employee's goal and the next steps, actions, and strategies toward achieving it. (Green, 2012). A sample check-in agenda and StepBack guiding questions can be seen in Appendix F which illustrates the goal centrality in these meetings. It would be unfair to simply describe feedback as "one-way" as I have personally experienced leaders' consistent openness to two-way feedback. I have also taken surveys that are intentionally designed for organizational feedback. However, the consistency of the goals-

based feedback sessions and the manager's role as question-asker and supporter of the work provides a significantly one-way orientation in a majority of these meetings.

Fear/Anxiety. Edmonson's last comparison of efficiency and learning (fear as motivator vs fear ascrippler) begins to shed light on some of the dissonance that I have felt anecdotally between the behaviors of employees and leadership. The notion that fear of boss or consequence can be constructive in an efficient organization and crippling in a learning organization is germane to this analysis as well. While Edmonson uses the word "fear" in the chart above, it should be noted that "anxiety" is also used to describe this feeling, especially as it relates to performance.

I attended multiple group events and conferences at Teach For America where leadership has presented, have received emails, and attended meetings weekly with the leadership and there is active intentionality towards reducing fear in the organization. As an example, during conference openings, leaders' speeches were imbued with thankfulness for the work, employees were encouraged to lean on each other, share successes and failures, and were told that they are the ones that know the most what needs to be done in their context (E. Villanueva-Beard, personal communication, January 27, 2015). The entire experience appears designed to embolden and empower through intentional effort towards diversity, inclusivity, and collaboration. There is no indication that leadership is intentionally engendering fear or anxiety in the organization.

There was, however, a palpable anxiety that occurred in my initial meetings with regions as we began the work designing our plans for learning. As a learning team, we had many conversations before and after these meetings about how to keep the project leads from "feeling judged" by the questions that we were asking and the support that we were offering. While we, as a learning team had never given any indication for expectation of successful

performance on projects, the grantees had clearly put performance expectations on themselves. If errors were brought up, especially in these initial meetings, we'd hear a response akin to "It's ok; I can just work harder/longer/execute better". A "Don't worry, I got this" mentality that limited the public testing of ideas and taking more risks when constructing learning, limiting double-loop opportunities as well. (Argyris, 1999)

Kegan and Lahey (2009) help to resolve this dissonance between the messages leaders send and the way they are received. In their work on adult development, perceptions (especially of younger, more junior employees) are shaped by many messages, both explicit and implicit (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) and TFA's past success and high achievement could be sending implicit expectations of performance to many in the organization and the seeking of external validation. Edmonson agrees; she states that organizations like consulting firms and investment banks, with strong histories of success and high achievement are often "breeding grounds" for anxiety that can inhibit learning. (Edmonson, 2008).

Bright Spot Analysis. The aforementioned "fear as motivator/crippler" juxtaposition is also helpful in explaining the suggestive success that stepback meetings had at achieving the desired learning results. What was different about them? From my original analysis, opportunity was equal, but there was increased information presented and better tools for the practitioners. Valid information is a necessary component, but the organizational context is based on the availability of data and information, so this would not fully explain the suggestive evidence.

It seems one logical explanation for these bright spots was the tools used in these stepback meetings. The tools (guiding question protocols) used in StepBacks gave a clear direction to be reflective and set the expectation that challenges and differences had indeed occurred. As facilitators, the learning partners and I had constructed questions assuming

that what was intended and what actually happened were going to be different, and the hypotheses for these differences were publicly tested and discussed. In order to follow directions of the meeting, a project lead had to identify challenges/failures, and data that was introduced was in this expectant and developmental context. Therefore, “bad performance data” using this approach was data for directing their decisions on next steps in development of the model, not summative data for judging the success or worth of the model itself.

Another explanation for the suggestive success of these StepBacks may be its alignment with Argyris’ notion of Model II theory in use, which is more conducive to double-loop learning. The Model II theory-in-use has the following governing variables:

- *Valid information*
- *Free and informed choice*
- *Internal Commitment* (Argyris, 1999, p.82)

As stated before, the StepBacks did have valid information available, which may not have been as present in the first meeting (Learning Plan Development), but it is also important to note that the data, measures and methods were sourced from the grantee themselves. This is unique to much of the data available to regions, which is centrally sourced and developed. This autonomy of choosing one’s own measures of success and research questions may have resulted in an internal commitment to the results gathered, less of a need for external validation, and a greater willingness to question the assumptions underlying the project.

Edmonson’s first instruction to organizations that endeavor to become learning organizations is helpful in explaining these suggestive results as well. Her first and important context-setting instruction is to “Make it Safe”. She argues that increasing the “psychological safety” felt by employees will lead to an increase in learning on teams. Edmonson says that two intuitive but important steps should be taken when establishing “psychological safety” in the work: acknowledging uncertainty and asking real questions.

(Edmonson, 2008) These two factors were a part of these StepBack meetings, as our intentionally developmental question guide explicitly acknowledged the uncertain contexts of innovative work and asked reflective questions related to it.

While Edmonson (2008) and Argyris (2002) were helpful in providing complementary explanation for the results achieved, it was also helpful to view the project through the lens I used to support my initial Theory of Action.

Revisiting the Adaptive Cycle

In my initial review of knowledge for action prior to implementing my project, the concept of the Adaptive Cycle was a helpful frame for understanding the organizational stages through the lens of natural cycles, and revisiting this cycle may also help to explain these results. In their book *Panarchy*, Gunderson and Holling (2002) posit that there are certain departures from the cycle, which are maladaptive “traps” that natural systems or



organizations can be stuck in: the “rigidity trap” and the “poverty trap”. (See Figure 11)

Figure 19. Stylized representation of departures from the adaptive cycle, known as the rigidity poverty traps. From *Getting to maybe : how the world is changed* (Kindle location 1045). Westley, F. (2006). Toronto: Toronto: Random House Canada.

In a poverty trap, the organization never fully reorganizes, and its potential and diversity degrade away. Conversely, the rigidity trap occurs at the height of exploitation, and does not allow for the release and renewal of organizational resources. This particular trap is often seen in organizations of tightly managed hierarchies, and is characterized by inflexibility to novel ideas and new ways of doing things (Gunderson & Holling, 2002).

Innovative projects, especially those in the developmental stage require a near constant reappraisal of the current work and its associated assumptions (Patton, 2011), and if the culture of the organization is characterized by inflexibility to other ways of doing things, could explain why, even in the innovation space, the default single-loop would dominate the responses to errors or mismatches. This is especially evident in organizations that have “achieved excellence” and lauded for their past successes. (Westley, 2006)

The benefit of human systems, as opposed to natural systems, is that these “traps” can be avoided through intentionally listening to multiple perspectives and constantly testing the assumptions that created (Gunderson & Holling, 2002). Francis Westley, who studies and engages in social innovation called this intentional act “standing still”. It involves “taking stock” and allowing new information to inform the work moving forward. (Westley, 2006) Again, the suggestive success of the intentionally reflective StepBacks in producing double-loop learning seems to be explained by this notion that intentionality can keep organizations and projects from the rigidity of one way thinking.

In the spirit of “standing still” and questioning assumptions, it is important that I examine and test my own Theory of Action for the strategic project that I undertook. Through the results gathered and further explanation of these results using various frames, I would like to propose some revisions to my previously stated Theory of Action. The largest

and most glaring weakness in my theory is the vagueness in how one might create the conditions. In my above analysis, the suggestive successes and research support the idea of increasing the intentionality in creating this reflection. Therefore, I have revised my previous Theory of Action to be reflective of the mechanisms suggested by both my results and the research. While still based on the conditions for double loop learning (opportunities, tools and valid information), the new Theory of Action provides more practical steps to achieving these conditions (See Figure 20).

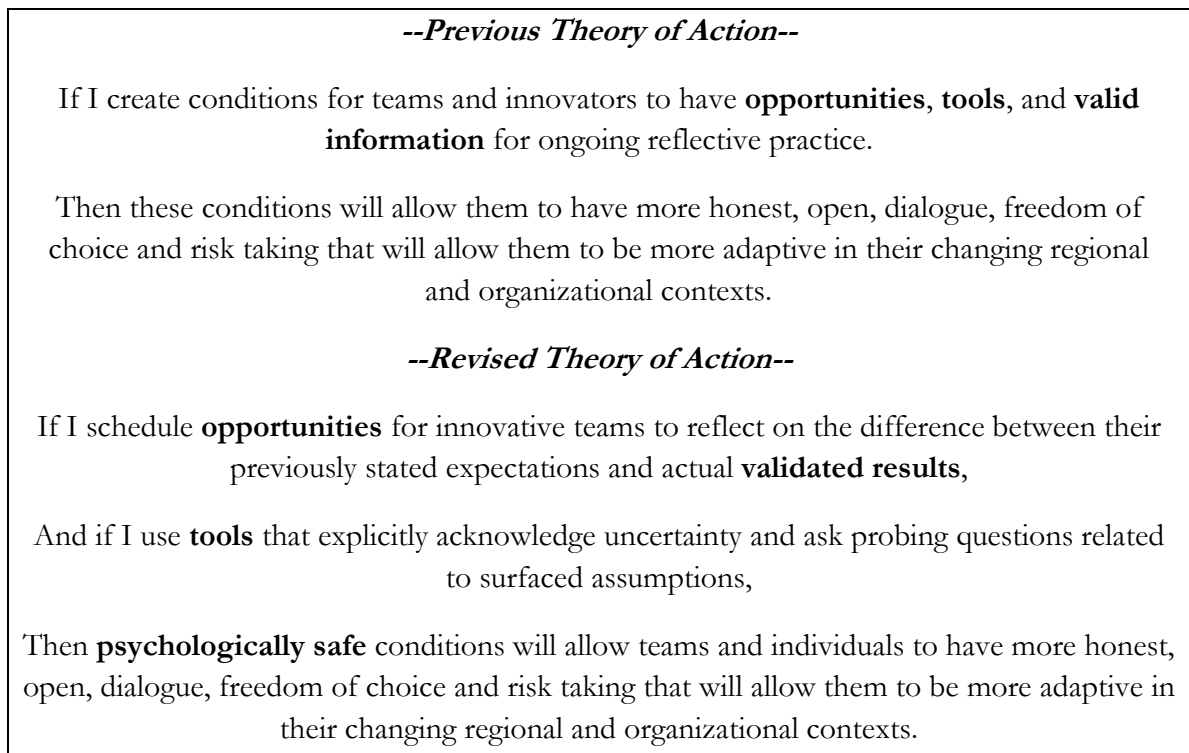


Figure 20. Previously stated and revised theories of action for creating learning processes for the Breakthrough Fund.

The preceding analysis not only helped me to further revise my Theory of Action, but the results and analysis using informed by the research also provide a starting point for the implications of the work moving forward. As I reflected on the work moving forward for myself, the site and the sector, I returned multiple times to another developmental frame

that also provided helpful insight. Prior to discussing implications, I felt it important to introduce this additional lens.

Implications for Self

As I entered TFA and began my strategic project, it was important for me to set some Design Principles for my work (See Intro for early rationale and description of these principles): Curiosity, Developmental Approach, Assuming Good Intentions, Following the Emergent, Boundary-crossing, & Examining Assumptions. I felt that this personal mindset would ensure that I was learning throughout the process, and I endeavored to allow others to operate in this mindset as well. The principles are grounded in exploration, inquiry, and reflection, and as I described in my introduction, they have been key to my own learning throughout my career.

Also important to the work, I set some personal developmental goals for the project. I wanted to ensure that through the work I was developing skills as a leader and operating at my learning edge. In assessing my own developmental journey, my biggest area in needing development was around advocacy and management. I am at my best in ‘learning mode’ and have always had an inherent ability to understand situations and people. My most successful projects have been more related to creating opportunities for execution, not necessarily tightly managing a project and advocating for preset outcomes. I had hoped that entering an organization known for its project management expertise and unwavering advocacy would somehow transfer to me.

As I see the juxtaposition of the design principles and my own learning and development goals, the tension between them is now apparent. I felt that tension the entire time, as I was constantly trying to follow my stated design principles, while working on two learning goals that seem to be exclusive of them. I was wedded to an inquiry-based, developmental process while working on my advocacy and management skills, and I had a hard time balancing this perceived contradiction in the work.

This emergent style I employed is evidenced in my timeline (See process intended vs actual results) as components of the project went more slowly than originally expected. It is also evident in the partially met components in my theory of action. From an exploration and inquiry standpoint, capitalizing on the emerging structures was the right way to operate, and ultimately the learning partners and grantees were seemingly invested in the process, but I never felt like I was successfully “managing the project”, which was an initial goal. There were instances when I knew a better way to do something, and I resisted bringing it up, thinking that it was incongruent with the principles of creating a learning structure, and if members of the learning team truly wanted to do it that way, I’d created the conditions for it to come from them.

This tension highlights an inherent flaw in my approach to leadership. I have always had a service orientation, understood simply as the “golden rule”; Treat others as you would like to be treated (Bible, Matthew 7:12). In my transition to leadership and subsequent development, I’ve forgotten how I wanted to be treated as a younger staff member. What many young people, or people new to a process or structure want, is a level of direction and expectation that I was not giving them. In my initial theory of action, creating the opportunity was enough, and people would run with it, but that is counter to the research. While opportunity is sufficient for certain employees, it may be insufficient for an employee making meaning from a more socialized point of view (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). They need more explicit permission and direction in the work, and most of the processes I led had only enabled opportunity, but did not explicitly direct processes.

Even though I set a goal for increased advocacy and management, when it came down to it, I saw this goal as antithetical to creating a learning organization, so I constantly fought my own developmental goal. This tension is resolved by Edmonson et. al when they

talk about the importance of the focus of the advocacy. Edmonson states, that in a learning structure, it is of the utmost importance to set, direct, and gather data on the processes. In a world as complex as education, defining and tracking products will always be difficult and insufficient, so it is best to manage the process.

In the future, this is where I will focus my advocacy and management efforts. I plan to surface design principles to others, and advocate for these as an important part of learning and innovation. I should also design a process that sets expectations and protects the important learning outcomes. Ultimately, allowing for emergent opportunities does not mean that everything about the project must emerge, it means I must set up a thoughtful process that is disciplined in its allowance for and protection of emergent points of view and outcomes; **In short, I must advocate for inquiry.**

Seeing the suggestive success of the protocol-based activities after the fact, both through my data and the anecdotal reception to them, my biggest leadership regret was the decision to keep the learning plan development meetings more “organic”. I had ideas for protocols (See Appendix H), but resisted, due to the dual purpose of these initial meetings (Introduction and relationship-building and learning plan development) I lost an opportunity to truly set strong process expectations for subsequent work together. In the future, separating these two functions (initial relationship-building & learning plan development) will help to increase much needed assumption-testing in initial plan development.

In addition, in the future, I plan to broaden use of protocols to work streams and interactions beyond the explicitly defined opportunities for reflection. In the case of the TFA context, I had multiple interactions (Check-ins, Learning Plan Development, Onboarding conversations) that could have become more intentional and enhanced by

meeting protocols. Had I done this, there is suggestive evidence that all of the interactions I had opportunity to design could have created more double-loop learning opportunities. This is especially important if I am leading in an organization that is working to shift a culture. Without intentionality, people follow the default culture. From my strategic project's results, it is apparent that protocols were an excellent tool for me to facilitate a process that ensures opportunity, expects valid information, and is a forcing mechanism for disciplined reflective practice. In addition, anecdotal data suggests that people in the organization responded with a universally positive reaction. At organizations like TFA in particular, which has operated in a previously tightly managed culture, facilitation with protocols, I can capitalize on the existing tight compliance capabilities and provide direction for behaving and thinking differently.

The last implication for my future work relates to the virtual environment in which I worked. I chose a virtual residency to test whether future opportunities in the virtual space were a feasible path forward for my leadership. I was especially interested in how I could develop trust and psychological safety in this environment, knowing that my past leadership practices had relied heavily on face-to-face interactions, informal relationship building and proximity to the teams I have led, none of which would be givens in the virtual environment. Prior to this experience, I believed that a leader built trust and psychological safety through informal and proximate means. I still believe that to be true, especially in a site-based work environment. However, in experiencing the counterfactual of the virtual world through this residency, I found that formality and distance could also be a means to creating safe conditions for learning and reflection.

The virtual environment offered very different mechanisms for me to engage with ideas and feedback. In virtual work, most meetings/interactions are scheduled events related to a

specific work streams or projects. The lack of informal relationship-building outside of intended work streams created the necessity for discussions to be continually centered on the ideas and the work (there was literally nothing else to talk or think about). This, along with literal distance from each other, seemed to create a healthy separation from the ideas discussed and the people who were present. In fact, on large calls, it was hard to tell who was actually speaking as the discussion continued. This virtual anonymity gave an even greater freedom for openness and honesty, as hierarchies and other power dynamics disappeared. In getting feedback, the lack of informal relationships and proximity made me less likely to attribute the feedback I was getting to other, less favorable intentions. This assumption of good intentions forced me to reflect more fully on the feedback, and made me less likely to engage in rationalization or defensive routines.

In the future, I can take further advantage of this by recognizing the value of formality and distance in the work. In the virtual space, I can continue to build my advocacy and formal management skills in a safer, more anonymous environment. In site-based work, this may take the form of reaching out to unfamiliar people for feedback and discussion on the work I am doing. It also may mean charging site-based teams I lead to schedule explicit times for various work streams to ensure the focus stays on the work.

Implications for Site

Based on my analysis, one of the possible explanations for the results are that Teach For America's organizational context preferences executing for efficiency and may need to put in place more intentional measures to create conditions and capabilities to execute for learning. The first set of implications below are derived from Edmonson's advice and follow her prescribed steps to transition toward a learning organization: (Edmonson, 2008).

Make It Safe

According to Edmonson, making it psychologically safe allows people to ask questions and offer ideas and concerns. It also creates an environment where people can become willing to fail. Failures (errors) are the beginning of learning, so making it safe is the first step for learning. She states that psychological safety comes from modeling openness, humility, and curiosity, acknowledging a lack of answers, and rewarding learning. (Edmonson, 2008)

The Co-CEOs, in their entry to the new position and the model of listening and questioning have done a great job of explicitly modeling and acknowledging the lack of answers, which has certainly created a strong foundation for the creation of psychological safety. In an organization that has been historically top-down and driven by a center organization that had the answers, being explicit about not having all the answers has been a powerful signal of the new organizational culture. While necessary, it is only the beginning of the work.

It should be noted that Kegan and Lahey (2009) might say, "safety is relative". In a certain stages of adult development, especially younger adults and those new to the organization, open sharing of ideas and concerns and public failure will only be possible if it is seen as the way to please others or what the group expects; a person in this stage of

development is hyper-sensitive to implicit group norms and expectations as well. Equally important as the explicit acknowledgment of uncertainty is to be cognizant of any implicit language or actions that send the opposite signal. One simple, but powerful change I would suggest is to change the way leaders talk about the first 10 years of TFA's existence. This is referred to as the "dark years" and it is characterized by the fledgling organization "not having the answers". Matt Kramer, Co-CEO, described them recently as a "difficult" time (Mead et. al, 2015). This may send a strong, implicit message about the perceived value of "not knowing" and making your way by exploring and searching for answers. While a simple change, ceasing this "dark years" narrative, and finding a positive way to describe the learning that occurred during this time could go a long way toward honoring a learning stance and making it safer not to know the answer.

Provide process guidelines

Edmonson states that providing flexible guidelines and processes informed by best practices also helps to create the conditions for execution as learning. Even if these guidelines and processes are not perfectly matched to every situation, they provide a framework from which to operate (Edmonson, 2008).

Again, TFA has a solid start on process management with their historically strong project management culture. This effective management paradigm is very important for continuous improvement and making incremental changes to exploit existing organizational routines and outcomes.



Figure 22. Excerpt from TFA project management slide deck. (See Appendix A).

However, TFA's new direction and organizational shift will require more exploration, creativity and adaptivity to achieve the breakthrough innovations and the "reimagining" of the support of their leaders and the communities they serve. Exploitation through project management is not the process for this new kind of work.

Besides creating the expectation and permission to innovate, putting intentional process guidelines in place that serve as juxtaposition to project management would help to provide a new framework for the new way of operating. A logical framework to use that starts from a challenge or problem to be solved, as opposed to a goal to be achieved is a design thinking framework.

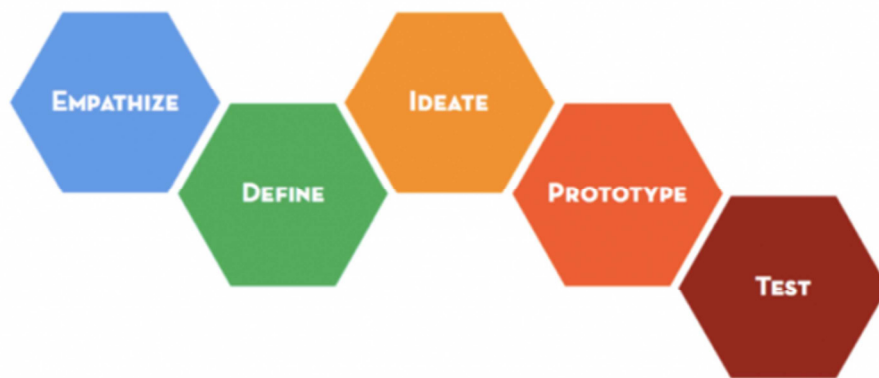


Figure 23. Stanford school Design Thinking Approach. From *An Introduction to Design Thinking: Process Guide*. (p. 6) (n.d.). Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford.

The design thinking process and its associated tools encourage exploration, prioritize listening and embrace the complexity of the challenges. Since it does not dictate a goal to be achieved, the goals can be set by the various regions or teams, and it can be a far more flexible, and less-outcomes based approach to understanding the challenges and testing different approaches to solving them. Because it is a non-sequential process, it also allows for emergent ideas, unintended consequences and more rapid pivoting of projects, which are all important in an organization that is in transition.

Provide real-time tools that enable employees to collaborate and make decisions

In shifting to a learning organization, Edmonson places great value in providing people with tools to make decisions and collaborate in real-time, and TFA should take steps in this direction as well.

The aforementioned design thinking framework has associated tools, protocols, and training for each part of the design process. Many organizations (See Appendix G) have explicit processes, tools and trainings for engaging in all steps of the design process. A good first step for TFA would be to decide which design process to employ and engage in a formal national partnership with one of the organizations listed (Appendix G). This would ensure that tools and training for staff are in place to build expectation and capabilities for engaging in this new process.

Additionally, the current software tools used at TFA are generally aligned with the past capabilities of the organization. PowerPoint, Email, and document briefs are the typical communication tools in this virtual setting. By nature, these tools create an individually generated linear and incremental process for creation of ideas. In my own experience, these tools allow one person to create a document, slide deck, or other deliverable and others in the organization to weigh in with their thoughts, improving and refining it through iterative feedback on this individually developed initial product. Very few tools in widespread use enable the co-creation of work. The organization does provide access to software tools that *could* be used for collaboration and decision-making (Google Docs, WebEx, Video Chat); however there were very few instances where the collaborative power of these tools was used to its fullest, and these were often supplemental vehicles for the individual work that was accomplished. As a first step, the organization could do a software audit to ensure that

software tools for collaboration and decision-making are both available and in use by employees.

In regards to decision-making, an ethos of data-driven decision-making permeates the organization, but it has yet to take the step towards real-time data for making decisions. As the organization shifts to more regional autonomy, they will find that all the valid information the center of the organization held in its leadership team will need to be available to regions while they make their decentralized decisions. Creating easy to understand dashboards that provide valid information for the myriad of decision-makers in the organization should be a future priority as well.

Collect process data

Collecting and using process data helps an organization understand how the work is going and provides multiple points for reflection and learning much earlier than the more summative and often lagging outcome indicators. In a learning organization, with frequent process data, reflecting and improving becomes a way of life, as opposed to an event.

Teach For America definitely values and collects process data through the administration of multiple surveys to staff, corps member and alumni on a myriad of topics throughout the year. At multiple times during the year, consequential decisions are made because of these surveys and processes are refined and improved based on the data.

Currently, these surveys are a consistent source of process data, but surveys may be limited in their ability to understand fully the impact a program has on its participants, as by nature, they are dependent on perception of the persons being surveyed. These perceptions, in the case of young adults or those new to the organization, may give the answer that is consistent with the way they are supposed to feel, as opposed to how they actually feel (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

TFA should begin to attempt to validate these perceptions by capturing more data related to knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of corps members and staff. A proposed first step is to expand the required portion of existing surveys to include open-ended responses asking for specific examples of behavior change. Another way to validate these perceptions is to asking supervisors or subordinates to fill out a corresponding survey asking them if them about specific knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Institutionalize disciplined reflection

Process data is only helpful if it is reflected upon and changes are made as a result. It is important to set routines and structures that allow for institutional reflection (Edmonson, 2008).

In my time in the organization, I have found the people there to be quite reflective in their work. The organization, too, creates opportunities for teams to engage in periodic StepBacks for reflection. Taking these opportunities one step further could really ensure that the organization is operating in both single and double loop learning modes. Often, as evidenced in my strategic project, the reflection on an error can result in a single-loop or tactical response. Introducing organization-wide protocols for disciplined planning and reflection would provide the tools for ensuring that big questions are asked and assumptions are being tested in the work. As a first step, TFA could institutionalize reflective protocols that cover the areas of project planning, mid-project reflection and after project review. Examples of each are listed below and presented in Appendix H).

- Pre-project planning (Example: Questions, Assumptions, and Prototypes)
- Mid-Project StepBack (Example: Project StepBack)
- Post-project reflection (Example: After Action Review)

“Standing Still”

Francis Westley, in her book *Getting to Maybe* uses the metaphor of “standing still” to avoid the traps that are present in the model of the Adaptive Cycle. As previously described, this standing still metaphor involves taking stock, deep inquiry and listening, and testing long held assumptions to ask, “are we on the right track?” In times of uncertainty, it is natural for people and teams in the organization to hold on to the assumptions, goals and outcomes of the past, more certain times in the organization. However, holding on to these past certainties can limit the opportunities and learning during this very different organizational stage (Westley, 2006).

Taking stock and listening as an organization could be operationalized by using open innovation methods. The essence of open innovation is ensuring that ideas are coming from everywhere, and that the organization has a process for managing and testing these ideas (Chesbrough, 2003). Institutionalizing these more exploratory methods is especially important at TFA, as they are transitioning from a default culture of exploiting ideas that came from center of the organization. There are various internal and external open innovation methodologies and processes that could be employed. I have included examples of some possible methods in the area of recruitment in Appendix I.

In addition to the benefits of new ideas and ways of thinking, adopting open innovation methods can also serve as a strong signal to both the internal and external environment. Internally, it can serve as institutional acknowledgement of uncertainty and deep inquiry, which will help to increase psychological safety in the organization (Edmonson, 2008). Externally, the increased permeability of ideas can serve to bolster the narrative that TFA is listening (Goldstein, 2014) while ensuring that the process is formally managed in order to mitigate risk.

Implications for Sector

Teach for America has achieved a level of success as an organization through effective management and a data-driven structure. Even with their success, they have reached a point in their organization where efficient and effective management alone is insufficient to create the breakthrough innovations they are looking for. With far more controllable factors than the rest of the sector, and significantly less scale and complexity in their workforce, they have made the decision to pivot and are seeing the need to develop capabilities beyond outcome based effective management.

Beginning in earnest with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the education sector, too has been focusing on an exploitation strategy of goals toward specifically tested student outcomes as the primary driver of innovation and reform. The success of this strategy is often debated by policymakers and experts, and there is not sector consensus on the exploitation strategy's impact (Ravitch & Chubb, 2009). However, the unintended learning consequences of this outcomes focused approach may be far-reaching. This is especially salient, as early indicators of student outcomes on the new Common Core aligned assessments have shown that fewer students are achieving these newly broadened outcomes (Hernández & Gebeloff, 2013).

The typical responses to publication of poor performance on these outcomes may be deleterious to the goal of innovation, improvement, and learning. As Argyris states, the default response to an error or mismatch is likely going to be defensiveness, a lack of free and valid information and very little public testing of new ideas. The typical learning that comes from this environment is single-loop learning, which can exploit current known strategies and tactics (Argyris, 2002). If the education sector aims to improve by the orders of magnitude necessary for closing the achievement gap and true educational equity, these

single-loop responses cannot be the default setting for the sector. Like TFA, it behooves sector leaders and policy-makers to think about how they might create different conditions that will lead to more open, honest dialogue, risk-taking, and valid information and double-loop learning. The following implications are suggested future directions to ensure that the K-12 sector is a learning sector.

Make the sector psychologically safe

As previously discussed, according to Edmonson, making it psychological safe is a first and important step to take to create a learning sector. She also writes about the importance of acknowledging uncertainty and asking good questions to promote psychological safety. These two important characteristics (uncertainty and good questions) are in opposition to the current behavior in the increasingly polarized education sector. The national conversation between reformers and anti-reformers currently is one characterized by certainty of position and who has the right answer. Very little uncertainty and deep inquiry are present, and in many cases, this behavior is avoided, as the opposition will use the expression of candor to advance their opposing argument. (Mahler, 2011). Thus, openly expressing areas of uncertainty and getting new ideas and solutions from new and disparate sources is virtually impossible.

This particular challenge will be difficult to solve, but seems important to advance the learning of the sector. A first step in this direction is to incentivize more boundary-crossing in the sector. As a traditional educator, stepping into a reform organization has opened a level of understanding and knowledge that I never would have reached regarding TFA, its people, its mission, and its Theory of Action. One practical idea that may be less invasive and more scalable than spending a ten month residency in the organization is to find a funder for a documentary, journal series, or weekly podcast on the people and the

work inside major sector organizations. It could serve to humanize and highlight the earnest intentions of both sides of this debate, and allow enough trust to be built for honest, open, dialogue.

Additionally, according to Edmonson's research regarding psychological safety, the biggest influence on psychological safety is one's immediate supervisor, as they create the conditions for openness and honesty and ultimately can make it safer to "fail" and try new things (Edmonson, 2008). One of more recent and widespread sector strategies is the inclusion of student outcome achievement in individual teacher ratings of effectiveness, which had previously been primarily up to school and/or district leaders. In my own experience as a school leader during this transition, it was much more difficult to create a psychologically safe environment when test scores had become another de facto supervisor for them, and my own ability to foster psychological safety was diminished. A first and important step is to give school leaders back their agency in this critically important area by decoupling student outcomes with individual teacher effectiveness ratings.

Create capacity and expectations for valid process data.

I believe that Teach For America's leaders recognize the value of data, and have the capacity and understanding to expand their approach to include more valid process data and enhance their ability to learn. However, qualitative and process data collection in the practitioner space is far less systematic than the outcome data that is currently gathered on every student. Collecting process data is an important step for creating a learning sector, but ensuring that the process data that is collected is valid is important as well. Just as policy was the driver of the current data and accountability structures, policy can also serve to increase process data collection.

The first step would be to recognize that valid process data collection takes time and capacity, and account for that by reducing the expectations related to student testing frequency. There have been multiple calls for limiting student testing in recent years, and scaling back these tests would be welcome by many practitioners and professional organizations. There are multiple sector organizations currently calling for this and many have solutions that would still allow valid outcome data to be produced. Discontinuing the yearly testing of every student would also free up district, state and federal monies/capacity to engage in process data collection and analysis.

Once capacity is created, the second step the sector could take is to develop policy expectations around valid process data collection. This could be as simple as student, parent and teacher surveys, or a more complex solution like structured site visits conducted by peer networks. Both of these particular solutions have many models at scale in the sector (Survey examples: Gallup, PanoramaEd, American Institutes for Research) (Peer Review examples: Big Picture Learning, International Baccalaureate, NCATE) and could serve as jumping off points for a process data policy platform.

Expand developmental evaluation use and capacity

The ongoing debate between summative/formative or qualitative/quantitative evaluation is viewed very differently when viewed through the lens of the adaptive cycle and what an organization or team needs for a particular phase of their development. It is likely an organization, and indeed, for an entire sector, that different teams and organizations will be at different stages between renewal and conservation, which require different approaches and capabilities in the work. Assuming that there is one, or even two best ways to learn from these different organizations over-simplifies the complexity that exists in practitioner work. The importance of matching learning processes with the stage of the cycle helps to

capture what is happening and helps teams and organizations continue to move through the cycle and remain adaptable in their contexts (Patton, 2011). In my search for answers to how to evaluate innovative projects, I landed in literature that was literally foreign to the American K-12 Education sector. As I was building tools for this project, I spoke with thought leaders in this emerging field, and all but one of them lived and does the majority of their work in Canada. Harvard, the largest private library on the planet, did not have the recently published books on developmental evaluation (C. Lillvik, personal communication, August 8, 2014). To their credit, they corrected this quickly, but this is indicative of the lack of rigor and importance applied to evaluating and learning from innovation in the country.

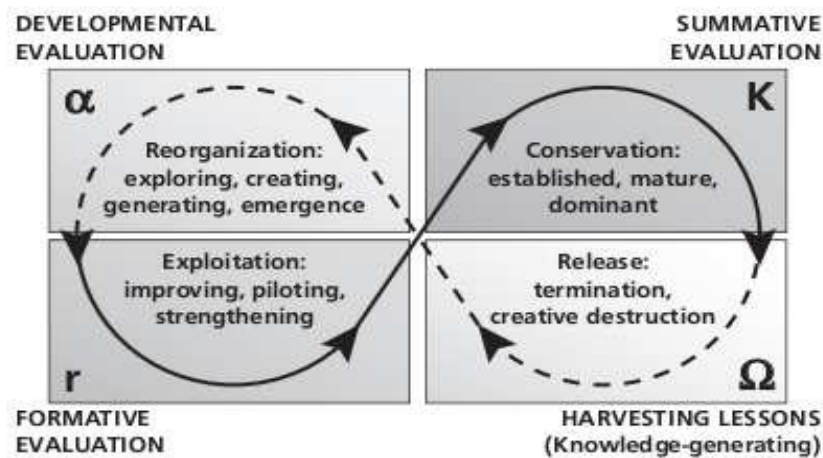


Figure 6. Evaluation types and the Adaptive Cycle. Retrieved from *Developmental evaluation : applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use* (p. 207), Patton, M. Q. (2011). New York: New York : Guilford Press, c2011.

This type of evaluation is important to add to the mix of evaluation uses in the United States, as it fills a unique and important niche in the sector (see Figure 6), especially important for new innovations. If we expect innovation to occur, and new ideas to be explored, generated, and further developed, this methodology acknowledges and allows for

starting from a place of uncertainty, as opposed to the other forms of evaluation (summative/formative) that presuppose that a “model” exists and is being improved or validated (Patton, 2011). Its characteristics of embracing of the uncertainty in the work, the concentration on probing questions and rigorous and timely data using tools and methods for collaborative decision-making is just what is needed for innovators in the education to ensure they are learning more rapidly and moving on the cycle towards exploiting and scaling those promising practices.

Conclusion

While Teach For America is currently shifting its organizational operating model and examining some long-held assumptions, their journey to scale was characterized by an intense focus on the mission and adherence to their proven model. My review of the literature, results and subsequent analysis posit that the success of effective management practices created a culture that was organized to execute for efficiency, but less well-positioned to execute for learning.

TFA has been successful on many measures of growth and quality over their 25 year history, especially notable is its growing corps' equivalent or better impact on student learning (Clark et. al, 2015) In fact, many point to them as a model for execution that proves that aggressive growth and quality can be mutually reinforcing (Mead et. al, 2015). One of the remaining questions I have as I conclude this piece of action research is whether TFA's method for scaling quality is the only way possible to achieve similar impact at scale.

As I ponder this question, I imagine a hypothesized counterfactual history of the sector. In this history, TFA, as an organization felt safe to "stand still" while scaling. Instead of being vilified by critics in every new region and context entered, which necessitated them to rely on internal management structures, their base assumptions of the recruitment, training, and support model for corps members and alumni leaders were openly tested with the help of local community members and school districts to be sure that the assumptions in their model held in the new context. If the assumptions weren't valid, the model was immediately adjusted to respond to the unique needs of the community and its students. How quickly would new insights have emerged? How different might the organization look in its different contexts? What sort of quality would have been achieved? Was the quality at scale that TFA achieved the ceiling or the floor of what could have been?

I am excited for the next chapter in TFA's history, and incredibly optimistic at the direction the organization is headed. Having met and worked with so many of the diverse, high-capacity, and committed staff in the organization, I am confident that their decision to empower more of their teams through autonomy and innovation will pay dividends for them in the end. I hope they continue to commit their collective effort to continuing this journey toward becoming a model learning organization for the sector, and I pray that the sector will join them in this evolution.

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APPENDIX A: Working Draft of New Organizational Mission

Our Mission

Our mission is **to enlist, develop and mobilize as many as possible of our nation's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence.**

We believe that Teach For America has a unique and important role to play, alongside many others, to reach One Day. We see that leadership has been and will continue to be crucial for the broader education effort, and we're seeing that our approach to channeling and developing leadership works. **The single most important thing we can do is to continue to be a critical source of the leadership that the movement most needs to drive change in education directly and in the broader society in ways that shape the opportunities available to all children.** Therefore we will continue to:

- Recruit highly sought after leaders who share the racial and economic backgrounds of our students *as well as* those who bring tremendous privilege within our current system
- Ask these leaders to make an enduring commitment to address educational inequity that starts by teaching for low-income communities for at least two years
- Place these leaders in low-income communities across the country, ensuring that we work in all the diverse communities that experience the challenges of educational inequity—racially, ethnically, and in both urban and rural areas.
- Support our alumni to develop the insight, orientations and conviction to be life-long agents of change in ways that align their individual motivations and capabilities with the greatest opportunities to make a difference. These will necessarily include a wide array of roles and fields, including classroom teaching, school and district leadership, public policy making and shaping, among many others.

Who we are not: While we encourage and support alumni to apply their leadership to address all of the root causes of educational inequity, the focus of our direct work does *not* include:

- *Serving solely as a source of permanent teachers for schools.* Developing life-long teachers is critical to the movement, but it's just one part of the overall leadership required to drive change—we are a talent pipeline for the entire effort.
- *Serving as the only source for new teachers.* We are excited about a world in which talented prospects have more options to become teachers based on their interests and needs. We intend to be the best choice for highly promising leaders who are committed to educational excellence and equity for all children in this country, but we do not seek to become the sole source of all teachers or the right fit for everyone interested in education.
- *Carving out space as master convener or architect of all reform efforts in a community.* We are one organization and should strive to partner with organizations locally to drive the change required. When we need to take a lead role, we may do so temporarily, but we do not seek to preserve the lead role for ourselves over time.
- *Organizing within communities.* We partner with organizers and community-based organizations to grow local movements for change, and we want our corps members and alumni to operate with a partnership orientation. However, TFA's core role is not focused on organizing local community members.
- *Aiming to directly dismantle racism and alleviate poverty through efforts outside of education.* Our work will continue to focus on education, even while we encourage and support our alumni to work on all dimensions of systemic injustice.

APPENDIX B: Phases for Project Management

Phases for Project Management*

Phase	Definition
Phase 1: Vision and Direction Setting	In this phase, project leaders define the current reality of how we are operating as well as develop a compelling future state that includes a vision for our culture and core values in action. They outline the general process for change and ensure that culture and behaviors are in place to support it. This phase also involves a high level scoping of the work, drafting workstreams, stating goals, assigning potential owners.
Phase 2: Research and Development	Defining the vision for our work is important but insufficient. We have to get to specifics. In phase 2, we engage in research and development to better understand the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and get clear on the details of where we are headed. This phase is known as Research and Development.
Phase 3: Design and Approval	In this phase, research and development work is sculpted into a clear, specific proposal for the end state. The proposal should be aligned with the conceptual direction set in Phase 1 and with the learnings of Phase 2. The initial design phase is concluded with the approval of key stakeholders (defined in Phase 1).
Phase 4: Operationalization and Implementation	Once the design is approved, implementation can begin (although planning and preparation for implementation can be happening throughout Phase 4). Operationalizing includes setting the culture, systems, and tools in place to begin implementing in the field. Implementation includes identifying leaders/champions, investing a wider range of stakeholders, and managing towards implementation milestones. Prior to beginning Phase 5, Phase 1 and 2 must be revisited.
Phase 5: Evaluation and Refinement	Even after implementation, our work is not done. The final phase is to evaluate our work and adjust/refine elements of the design or implementation in order to sustain momentum and move closer to our intended outcomes.

Each of these phases must have a portion of the work dedicated to work scoping and project management. The "project" for each phase should contain workstream goals, stakeholders, decision processes, key milestones, deadlines, and division of responsibility. It also includes a plan and structure for communication and engagement.

*These phases are adapted from a framework developed by the consulting firm. Root Inc. (<http://www.rootinc.com/>)

APPENDIX C: Worksheet for Capturing Project Insights

Stage of Development

What stage of development is your innovation or project in?

€ **Developing Stage.**

These are innovations that are just being developed. Innovators have a problem they hope to solve and some inkling for how they will go about solving it, but most of the activities related to the innovation are being developed as the project is implemented. There is no explicit “model” being followed or the model is brand new to your context and you expect to have to make some pretty significant changes to it to make it your own. The goal of this stage is to develop an initial model that can be improved upon. Activities related to these types of projects are experiments and tests of as many assumptions and theories as possible that are built into the idea or the innovation. Some would call this a “start-up” phase.

€ **Improving Stage.**

These are projects that already have an initial model for what is happening and most of the related activities/components of the project have been initially tested. It might be the first or second iteration of a full-fledged pilot with increasing numbers of participants. The various components of the program are still being tested for impact and there is still a sense that the project can be improved. This would also apply to projects that are partnering with an external provider that has a proven strategy, but that will need to be modified and improved for the context. The goal at the end of every iteration of this stage is an improved model. Projects may stay in this stage for a very long time depending on how complex the innovation is.

€ **Testing Stage.**

This stage is to prove or validate that the model program “works” and ensures that the impact of the project has been isolated as the cause of the outcomes that are being measured. This often results in a formal impact evaluation, quasi-experimental or randomized trial. The activities are pre-planned and have been sufficiently improved through the previous stage and the goal is strict compliance to the project plan or model program. It is after this stage that a decision to scale might be made.

Purpose

What do you hope to accomplish with this pilot/innovation? What are your goals? What are your hypotheses? In other words, what do you hope to be different as a result of this pilot/innovation or what would be true for participants who engaged in this experience compared to those who didn't?

Your response will be the same for all stages of the innovation life cycle (developing, improving, and testing).

<insert purpose>

Pilot and comparison group(s)

Who is your pilot group? Who will be "receiving" the innovation? How many pilot participants will you have? Who will act as your comparison group to the pilot group? How many folks are in the comparison group?

For groups of 30 or fewer participants, use of quantitative data will be limited; therefore, the use of qualitative data (e.g., focus groups) might be more helpful. Additionally, your pilots/comparison groups will likely vary depending on which stage your innovation is in.

- **Developing and Improving stage:** You may not have a comparison group during these stages - although, we always encourage one when possible, sometimes you can even use pre-post data or past research as a comparison!
- **Testing Stage.** Having a comparison group is critical to understanding the impact of your innovation. This comparison might be historical, CMs who expressed interest, but weren't selected, CMs in a similar context, but who did not engage in the innovation, etc, etc.

<insert pilot and comparison group>

Decisions and Key Questions

What decision will you need to make, on what timeline, and who is/are the decision maker(s)/stakeholder(s)? Given that decision, what key questions do you need to answer? What is the high level timeline for when you will want to update your stakeholders, collect data, and/or make decisions?

Your decisions/questions will likely vary depending on which stage your innovation is in. For example:

- **Developing Stage.** *What are the key assumptions our innovation depends on and how can we test them early on to save time, cost and energy (i.e. if this were true, we'd have to totally rethink the approach)? Who else is doing this and what can we learn from the research? What parts of our innovation can we test and experiment with before we include it into a full-fledged pilot or programming? What is the minimum viable product that I need to see if this is going to work?*
- **Improving Stage.** *What are the best practices that will help me refine and scale my pilot? What are the factors that drive impact, in what situations and for whom? What insights do we have on impact and how can we increase that impact?*
- **Testing Stage.** *What is the impact of this pilot on pilot participants as compared to their comparison peers? Is this something that should be continued, expanded, or rolled back?*

<insert key questions>

Measures of success and methods

Before you identify your measures of success, you must articulate the outcomes of your innovation. Go back to, “what do you hope will be different as a result of your innovation?” Once you have articulated those outcomes, you can ask yourselves, “what specific measures of success* will you use to determine the impact of your innovation?” What measures of success can you collect along the way to help you understand the progress of your innovation and give you real-time feedback on if/how to change direction? How will you collect the data for those measures of success (e.g., survey questions, focus groups, observations)? What types of evidence will you need to capture emerging insights?

Your outcomes of interest will likely vary depending on which stage your innovation is in. For example:

- **Developing Stage.** *Answers to initial questions related to key assumptions in your innovation, and results of the experiments on separate components and initial pilot testing of the developed model. “Success” at this stage is characterized by continuing to move towards answers to these questions by obtaining valid results on these initial experiments.*
- **Improving Stage.** *Qualitative data and potentially some quantitative data on leading indicators and/or short term outcomes to that will inform iterations to the initial model.*
- **Testing Stage.** *Quantitative data, including results of an impact evaluation that has a rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental design.*

*Here are links to learn more about [TLD data](#) and the six [nationally tracked metrics](#) (e.g., CSI, CALI, retention, etc). While you are not required to track all of the six metrics for your

pilot and you are strongly encouraged to use additional metrics more directly aligned to your pilot's goals/hypotheses, folks are often interested in understanding how a pilot/innovation influenced the nationally tracked metrics.

<Insert outcomes of interest and/or measures of success>

<Insert methods for measuring those outcomes>

Analysis

How will you use that data to reflect on process and progress? What would you (and/or the final decision-makers) have to see in your results to determine next steps?

Your answers will vary depending on which stage your innovation is in. For example:

- **Developing:** Analysis and reflection will occur constantly based on information and data from the multiple tests of assumptions and little experiments during the development of the project. Possibly resulting in an initial model for improvement.
- **Improving.** Trends and headlines from interviews/focus groups; descriptive statistics on preliminary data from leading indicator and implications for improvement of pilot.
- **Testing.** Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and inferences of impact caused by program (This model program caused this result).

<Insert possible ways that analysis might occur, including a schedule for reflection based on the frequency of data collected (If you are getting results weekly, weekly reflection should be scheduled.)>

APPENDIX D: Examples of Evolving Logic Models

A lack of human capital for school leadership positions creates a critical obstacle to creating transformational schools in rural regions, and our alumni seeking the principalship are discouraged from staying in their rural corps placement due to a scarcity of viable school leadership pathways – to either traditional or charter principalships.

We will create a principal pipeline program that will specifically serve rural regions.

Inputs		Outputs		Outcomes & Impact	
Resources	Activities	Participation	Short Term	Medium Term	Longer Term
Innovation Funding	Recruitment and Selection				
	Nomination/Referral Forms	All Alumni living or working in rural region 1/2 CMs. TFA staff that are S&T facing	Increased number of eligible applicants from nomination sources	Selected applicants derived from nomination process.	All selected applicants have: A vision and motivation for school leadership. The ability to constantly improve, persevere, and solve complex challenges. Self-confidence, maturity, and exceptional communications skills. An interest in continuing to live and work in a rural region.
	2 Step Selection process (application and interview)		Quality Pool of eligible applicants representing all regions identified as rural		
	Programming: Year 1				
Selected Faculty with Rural Backgrounds	Intensive summer professional development in the summer of 2014	20 aspiring leaders/1 week	Increase in understanding/skills related to curriculum scope/sequence	Effective Career coaching and mentorship aligned with rural context leadership	Access and opportunity for open positions in rural leadership.
	Weekend retreats	20 aspiring leaders/3x per year	Increase in understanding of rural challenges, school practices, and VBLD competency		
Selected mentors with knowledge of rural context	Partnership with a rural principal mentor	20 leaders and mentors monthly?	greater understanding of challenges specifically related to rural context	Higher quality solutions for leadership challenges and sense of belongingness to cohort.	Network of thought partners/supporters that lasts beyond the program's life cycle.
	Cohort calls	20 aspiring leaders/monthly	Feeling of support from other members of the cohort and continuance of coursework learnings		
	Programming: Year 2				
Selected Rural Schools	Coursework	20 leaders	Same as above?	Same as above?	Principal Position attained in rural district
	Partnership with a rural principal mentor	monthly?			Continued commitment to rural school leadership
	High Performing School Rural School Leadership Residency	20 leaders/year-long			

A lack of human capital for school leadership positions creates a critical obstacle to creating transformational schools in rural regions, and our alumni seeking the principalship are discouraged from staying in their rural corps placement due to a scarcity of viable school leadership pathways – to either traditional or charter principalships.

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Innovation Funding	Recruitment and Selection				
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	2 Step Selection process (application and interview)		Quality Pool of eligible applicants representing all regions identified as rural		
	Programming: Year 1				
Selected Faculty with Rural Backgrounds	KSLP Programming	4 aspiring leaders/1 week	Increase in understanding/skills related to KSLP curriculum scope/sequence	Demonstration of learning from KSLP scope applied to challenges in participant contexts	Access and opportunity for open positions in rural leadership.
	Weekend retreats	4 aspiring leaders/3x per year	Increase in understanding of rural challenges, school practices, and VBLD competency		
Selected mentors with knowledge of rural context	Partnership with a rural principal mentor	4 leaders and mentors monthly?		Higher quality solutions for leadership challenges and sense of belongingness to cohort.	Network of thought partners/supporters that lasts beyond the program's life cycle.
	Cohort calls	4 aspiring leaders/monthly	Feeling of support from other members of the cohort and continuance of coursework learnings		
	Programming: Year 2				
Selected Rural Schools	Coursework	4 leaders	???	???	Principal Position attained in rural district
	Partnership with a rural principal mentor	monthly?			Continued rural commitment and retention of rural principal fellows
	Rural School Leadership Residency	4 leaders/year-long			

APPENDIX E: Sample Grantee Update

Innovation Grantee Progress Brief

The following is a brief update on the progress of innovative projects that have been awarded funding through the FY13 Innovation Challenge and FY15 Breakthrough Fund.

- 16 total projects have been funded through the FY13 Innovation Challenge (4) and the inaugural round of Breakthrough Funding (13).
- The Strategy, Innovation and Organizational Development team — together with national functional teams — is partnering with regions to develop project learning plans for both rounds of funding. This ongoing support seeks to capture and communicate the opportunities, challenges and possible impact of the funded projects in order to:
 - Enable innovators to make better, more informed decisions during project development and implementation.
 - Build a knowledgebase for other regions and teams to replicate, redevelop and learn from these projects in their various contexts.
- As expected with innovative projects, actual project timelines have not always matched proposed timeline progress.
 - Enablers of a faster project launch have been alignment with regional strategy, protected and allocated capacity for the innovative project and previously hired staff that is already familiar with context of region and community.
 - Inhibitors of project launch were the extended timeline of breakthrough funding decisions, hiring and on-boarding of new staff, and unexpectedly long duration of relationship and trust building in projects with newly formed external partnerships.

Sample Grantee Updates

XXXXXX, Manager, Community Investment

Project Purpose: To partner corps members with regional staff who identify as Native and who have strong ties to our communities in order to rally students around ambitious goals, to organize students' families and community members toward educational equity, and to accelerate trust-building between corps members and the community more broadly.

Update: Two new staff members have been hired and working for the past year on this project. The first year was spent in individual and community meetings helping to build bridges and understanding with various community stakeholders. They have made significant strides in gaining legitimacy for TFA with communities, tribal leaders and local political leaders. We are currently partnering with them to help quantify/validate these first year "wins" and incorporate them into a more intentional study of impact. This year, the two managers have begun PD programming for CMs. 8 CMs did initial 8 week training and 15 CMs are signed up for next round. They are beginning to plan and will be implementing parent workshops this school year as well. The learning plan will focus on the impact of these roles on parent/community engagement, CALI/CSI, CM cultural competency, and community perceptions.

XXXXXXX, Rural Principals' Fellowship

Project Purpose: A lack of human capital for school leadership positions creates a critical obstacle to creating transformational schools in these regions, but our alumni seeking the principalship are discouraged from staying in their rural corps placement due to a scarcity of viable school leadership pathways – to either traditional or charter principalships. To change that, we will create a principal pipeline program that will specifically serve our rural regions.

Update: First cohort (4 alums) is engaging in inaugural year of programming. RPF partnered with KIPP so that the individuals would begin by engaging in the KIPP School Leaders Program (KSLP). Early strengths of the project involve the cohort's expected successful completion of KSLP, advantages to all four being in one program, there seems to be few alternatives for rural school leader pipelines, and most of the candidates have already been given additional responsibilities in their roles. Early challenges are that the initial KIPP programming context doesn't necessarily match rural needs, KSLP is having some unexpected certification complications, TFA staff have had low touch with initial cohort so far, and unexpected funding needs for travel/certification. TFA programming scope will take over in the spring of this year for first cohort and second cohort is currently in the recruitment/application process. The learning plan will focus on qualitative interviews with current cohort to determine short term program effectiveness. Key long term outcomes include increases in retention of rural staff, alumni rural school leaders, and high quality rural schools.

XXXXX, Leveraging Technology to Reimagine our Regional Teacher Support and Development

Project Purpose: Develop new technology (including social media and mobile technology) to support regional redesign of teacher training and support; and, add "TAL content area experts" to collect, curate and design more content-specific resources, trainings and professional development for corps members, alumni and partners.

Update: Funding was only granted for the technology platform portion of the proposal. Initial strategy of in-house development for platform was abandoned and are currently partnering with a vendor for software development (200K). One component of platform (Event Advertiser) is up and running. They have used a "broad launch strategy" and studying the differences of users and non-users. We are providing analytical support to help inform their "learning loops" by combining their system usage data and our CM data (e.g., national CM survey results) to identify trends

Progress Note: Progress is slower than expected as the tech platform is one piece of larger project that isn't fully implemented, software development cycle is slow, and finding test users has been more complicated than previously expected .

XXXXX, 2030 Community Mobilization Project

Project Description: Build capacity and plans for community engagement, relationship-building, and design thinking among a select cohort of corps members, alumni and staff. There is also periodic engagement of entire regional corps in the project as it develops.

Update: A small team of CMs, Alums, and regional staff are co-designing this experience. They are currently selecting for their first cohort of 30 that will engage in the "Breakthrough Project", which will be focused, biweekly programming during the last half of this school year. The overall scope/sequence is a two-year design thinking approach in order to generate ideas for solving persistent problems in the region's community and schools. The initial meetings will involve immersion in community and empathy building and the programming for those is being planned currently. Focus of the learning plan includes individual participant growth in pre-defined programmatic goals and overall CSI/CALI improvement for the region.

Progress Note: Region got a late start on their project as project details were not finalized until early November due to changes in scope from initial application. In fact, they are still in the process of hiring a position that will be largely tasked with the execution of the program after initial design efforts are completed.

APPENDIX F: CHECK-INS AND STEPBACKS

Sample Check-in

This week will be successful if:

1. All materials for training are finalized and out the door by Thursday night.
2. The conference presentation is started and is on track to be done by the end of next week.
3. The newsletter draft is complete and ready for layout.

Weekly priorities should be few in number (two to four) in order to focus on the most important areas, and they should be presented as outcomes so it's clear at the end of the week if they've been achieved.

Key Updates

- Training: outline/ agenda completed, materials for first training about to be finalized
- Housing: new coalition members
- Outreach: newsletter on schedule

Items for Manager's Thoughts

- Program associate opening—candidates/hiring process
- Coalition— getting pushback from A.W.M.; would love to talk this through
- Conference talk— touch base to check my thinking

3. Lessons Learned Quick debrief of house meetings

(my Quick debrief of house meetings (my view: pluses were great messaging, clear assignments on our team; main thing to improve was my checking in more with individual leads to make sure all was on track)

4. On Back Burner/ Not Getting to Yet (FYI) Grant proposal Online advocacy center overhaul

5. Next Steps/ Repeat-Back

Green, Alison; Hauser, Jerry (2012-07-09). Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Manager's Guide to Getting Results (Kindle Locations 1621-1739). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

Guiding Questions for StepBack meetings

Pull out the staffer's goals and discuss how her progress is matching up against them.

Is she on track to meet her goals?

Where does she need to restrategize?

What has she put aside while working on something else but should be moved to a more active status again, or vice versa?

What lessons has she learned from recent work, and how might she apply them in the future?

What might you both be able to do to help the staff member develop further?

What else needs to happen to achieve X?

Is there anything you should be starting on now in anticipation of what's coming up in the next few months?

For goals that are getting off-track: What's happened to throw us off-track? W

What are you doing to restrategize your plan for that goal?

What could go wrong?

What worries you?

What can you do to plan now for those possibilities?

Are there items that have been deprioritized that we should move to the front of our attention now?

Are there items that we should be focusing on less now in favor of higher priorities?

Green, Alison; Hauser, Jerry (2012-07-09). Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Manager's Guide to Getting Results (Kindle Locations 1621-1739). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

APPENDIX G: Design Methodologies and associated tools

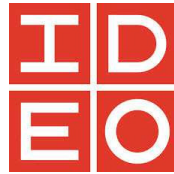
Outline of Specific Design Methodologies

Many designers and firms who engage in the work of design thinking have expanded and specified their own set of steps associated with the intentional process of engaging in the work of design thinking. Below are brief descriptions of some of these methodologies. While the process presented below are all linear in form, it is important to keep in mind that these steps can and should be revisited as more information is gathered in each subsequent step. While presented as stepwise progressions, in reality, designers begin at different stages and cycle through stages in different orders when as the context dictates.



The Institute of Design at Stanford (d. school) uses the methodology below for describing the design thinking process:

Empathize	Understanding people in the context of the challenge; It is deeply understanding what they do and how they do it, what they need and why they need it, and how they make sense of the world around them.
Define	Making sense of the information gathered in the empathize mode. The ultimate goal of this step is to have a meaningful and actionable problem statement.
Ideate	Generating multiple ideas for the problem that was defined. These ideas become the fuel and source for the development of prototypes.
Prototype	Creating iterative artifacts that answer questions and get the designer closer to the possible solution. In general, these prototypes are low-resolution (quick and cheap) and do not contain all of the features of the final solution. They are simply intended to answer specific questions and get feedback from users or colleagues. The final stage prototypes may be more refined and closer to the actual solution that is ultimately tested.
Test	Soliciting feedback on increasingly higher resolution prototypes. This is another opportunity to gain empathy for the users and better understand their needs. Ideally, the prototypes would be tested in real-life situations, but there are also many ways to solicit feedback without real life immersion.



IDEO, a company founded in 1991 has made specific toolkits for educators and those involved in worldwide social innovation and NGO work. For the educators, the steps are similar to the process codified by the d. school, while the toolkit for NGO's is simplified into three steps. While a different number of steps exists at the highest level of abstraction for these toolkits, each of IDEO's offerings generally correspond to each other once sub steps are involved.

Educators' Toolkit

Discovery	Understanding the challenge, preparing research and gathering inspiration from the people and users with which you are working and analogous settings with similar characteristics.
Interpretation	Transforming stories into meaningful insights. These insights lead to a compelling point of view and initial direction for ideation.
Ideation	Generating lots of ideas and refining the most promising of those ideas in order to have a direction for the experimentation phase.
Experimentation	Making ideas tangible through the building of prototypes and getting feedback from others on them. This can go through many iterations.
Evolution	Developing the concept over time by planning next steps, communicating the idea with those that can help and documenting the process along the way.

Human Centered Design Toolkit

Hear	Collect stories and inspiration from people. This involves preparing for and conducting field research, as well as developing insights from the research presented as stories.
Deliver	Working together (in a workshop setting) to create frameworks, opportunities, solutions and prototypes.
Create	Continuing to refine solutions and models through revenue and cost modeling, capability assessment and implementation planning.



There are many education-based instances of this methodology as well. For example, The International Baccalaureate Programme provides a well-known curriculum for students throughout the world. In their technology curriculum, the IB Programme incorporates the concept of the Design Cycle, which is another iteration of this process using four steps.

Investigate	Identify the problem the problem to be solved and formulate the design brief and design specifications.
Plan	Design a solution and the steps to creating the solution.
Create	Build the solution using appropriate techniques and equipment by following the plan that was designed.
Evaluate	Carry out tests the solution to evaluate its impact and effectiveness. Designers should also make suggestions for improving and refining the solution.

LUMA INSTITUTE™

LUMA is an organization based in Pittsburgh, PA that grew out of design work at Carnegie Mellon University. It is dedicated to providing resources and training in order to equip individuals and organizations to accelerate their innovation. They also provide tools aligned to their methodology, which is a simplified 3-step approach to design thinking:

Look	The process of observing human experience.
Understand	The process of analyzing problems and opportunities.
Make	The process of envisioning future possibilities and solutions.



Two other well-known design firms have processes they use for the design process, each with three steps as well. Frog Design, founded in 1969 as a product design firm, but who have recently expanded their services to include the full user experience uses a 3D process (*Discover, Design, Deliver*). SAP, which is another well-known design firm in the area of user-interface, frames their steps in terms of users and interactions. Their steps consist of *Understanding Users, Defining Interactions, and then Designing the User Interaction*.


Methodology Crosswalk

A crosswalk of the methodologies outlined above is provided below.

Overview	 d.SCHOOL HASSO PLATTNER Institute of Design at Stanford	 Educator	 NGO		LUMA		
Inspiration	Empathize	Discovery	Hear	Investigate	Look	Discover	Understand Users
	Define	Interpretation					Define Interactions
Ideation	Ideate	Ideation	Create	Plan	Understand	Design	Design User Interaction
	Prototype	Experimentation		Create			
Implementation	Test	Evolution	Deliver	Evaluate	Make	Deliver	


Links to Specific Toolkits

 **IDEO Human Centered Design Toolkit**
<http://www.ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/>

 **IDEO Design Thinking for Educators**
<http://www.designthinkingforeducators.com/>

 **IDEO online toolkit**
<http://www.designkit.org/>

 **Stanford d.School Bootcamp Bootleg**
<http://dschool.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/BootcampBootleg2010v2SLIM.pdf>

 **LUMA INSTITUTE™ LUMA Institute Innovating For People Handbook**
<http://www.amazon.com/Innovating-People-Handbook-Human-Centered-Methods/dp/0985750901>

WHAT IS A PROTOTYPE?

*A prototype is a question.
It lowers the risk of exploration.
It asks the questions you forgot to ask.*

WHY PROTOTYPE?

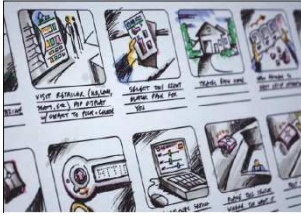
*To maximize impact and minimize sunk time and cost
To challenge assumptions
To avoid premature emotional attachment
To advance the design process through milestones
To find ways to fail before it matters*

PROTOTYPING WITH A PURPOSE...

Prototype with a purpose; think about what you are trying to learn by prototyping. Identify one variable/assumption to test with each prototype you build. Bring resolution to that aspect of the prototype. Remember a prototype doesn't have to be, or even look like the solution or idea. It should, however, answer the questions you have about your idea. You might want to know how heavy a device should be. You can create prototypes of varied weight, without making each one operable. In another example, you may want to find out if a group of students respond better to a certain type of instruction, so you role play with a church group you teach on Sunday Mornings.

PROCESS PROTOTYPING EXAMPLES

Storyboarding



Storyboard prototypes are especially useful when designing user experiences. Storyboarding involves quick sketches of “scenes” of important interactions between users and your product or service. It quickly tells the story of your idea from beginning to end, from the perspective of the user.

Role Playing



Role-playing is a method for stepping into someone else's shoes, taking on a persona, and acting like that person in a particular scene that you've constructed with other characters. From there, you are able to focus in on the person-to-person interactions you're having as that character.

Bodystorming



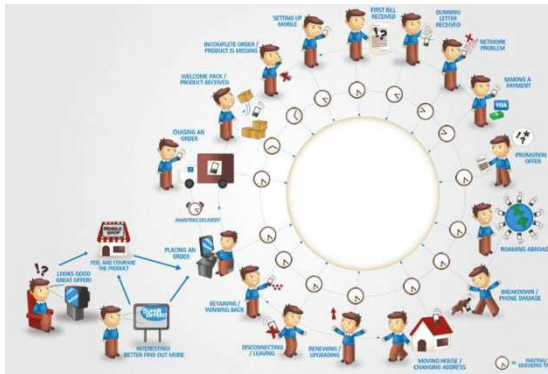
Bodystorming is a unique method that spans empathy work, ideation, and prototyping. Bodystorming is technique of physically experiencing a situation to derive new ideas. It requires setting up an experience - complete with necessary artifacts and people - and physically “testing” it. Bodystorming can also include physically changing your space during ideation. What

you're focused on here is the way you interact with your environment and the choices you make while in it.

Concept Poster

An overall summary of the major highlights and assumptions of a new idea or concept. This is a great tool for getting feedback, as it outlines the entire concept.

Schematic Diagramming/Journey Mapping



This is the use of concept mapping to make complex interactions and multiple step processes easier to understand and comprehend. It is very good for visualizing systems and abstract concepts that have many interrelated parts and/or hierarchical structure.

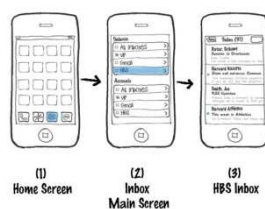
PRODUCT PROTOTYPING EXAMPLES

Physical Prototype



Physical Prototyping is the process of making a physical representation of an idea. Early in the process physical prototypes can be made of all kinds of materials. Physical prototypes allow the designer and users to interact with the idea. By building an idea designers are challenged to "build to think" and thus gain deeper insights.

Paper Prototype (Especially good with Digital interfaces)



You can develop a very low resolution model of an interface you're designing and be able to have a real user interact with it and give you feedback about it without having to implement anything digitally. You can change things on the fly and iterate rapidly on paper before committing anything to code and pixels.

APPENDIX H: Pre, Mid, and Post Project Reflective Protocols

Questions, Assumptions, and Prototypes

Note: This protocol was adapted from “Questions and Assumptions” protocol from School Reform Initiative which was developed in the field by educators. For more information visit [http:// schoolreforminitiative.org/](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/).

Purpose

To increase awareness of assumptions embedded in initial project designs and descriptions, and build community among participants through sharing professional questions and concerns.

Introduction

This activity can be used with any set of questions or statements

Process (suggested timing in parentheses)

- Before engaging in Questions and Assumptions, the facilitator could use large pieces of paper to create space on the wall for participants to place their written questions and assumptions. If the chosen text has predictable breaks (e.g., a list, section headings), it may be helpful to create several smaller places for participants to post their thinking.
- (5) Offer an example of a phrase (e.g., collaborative culture) and ask participants to identify assumptions embedded in it. *Example Assumptions: there is such a thing as collaborative culture, that it will impact learning, that it will positively affect each learner, that it is possible to reform it, etc.*
- (5) Hand out the written project description, and ask participants clarify any questions they have prior to engaging in the activity (i.e. make sure they understand the major aspects of the project and its intended impact)
- (5-15) Offer participants time to examine the description and identify **questions** and **assumptions**, and write them down, one per sticky note. If the facilitator chooses to create several smaller spaces due to the text structure, it may be helpful to encourage participants to code their sticky notes so they know where to place them.
- (3-5) After an amount of time in which participants can “mine” the description, encourage them to stand and quietly place their sticky notes in the wall spaces that have been created.
- (5) Engage in Affinity Mapping protocol to identify major themes of identified **questions** and **assumptions**. If multiple wall areas exist, participants might only choose one of the wall areas.
- (5) For each of the major themes, identify possible **prototypes** that can be employed to answer questions/test assumptions.
- Debrief the processes. (5 minutes)

Project StepBack

Project Update (15)

- How's it going, what's the latest update on the project?
- Where are you all in the work compared to where you expected to be?
- What contextual or organizational factors have impacted this progress?

Project Launch (10)

- What was your approach or what steps have you taken to “get this off the ground?” What led you to take those steps (or what factors were you considering that led you to take those steps or make those choices)?

Wins/Challenges/Surprises (15)

- What were your big wins in the first few months? How do you know? What factors led to those big wins?
- What were your biggest challenges? Were there any big surprises? If so, what were they? What factors led to those challenges or surprises?
- Given those wins and challenges/surprises, what would you do next time? Tomorrow? Next month? Next year?
- Is there anything you think the organization should do?

Data/Metrics (10)

- What trends does your most data surface and how does/doesn't that match what you're seeing on the ground? Do you think you are collecting the right data? What other data/metrics do you think would help you learn more about the impact of the work you are doing? Is there an organizational metric that approximates your measure of success?

Now what? (10)

- What's top of mind for you now? What's on the horizon?
-

After Action Review

Note: This protocol is adapted from AAR template at http://betterevaluation.org/evaluation-options/after_action_review

Process

(15) These questions establish a common understanding of the work item under review. The facilitator should encourage and promote discussion around these questions. In particular, divergences from the plan should be explored.

- What was supposed to happen?
- What actually happened?
- Why were there differences?
- What role did project context play?

(20) These questions generate reflection about the successes and failures during the course of the project, activity, event or task. The question ‘Why?’ generates understanding of the root causes of these successes and failures.

- Was it a success?
- What worked?
- What didn’t?
- Why?

(10) This question is intended to help identify specific actionable recommendations. The facilitator asks the team members for crisp and clear, achievable and future-oriented recommendations.

- What would you do differently next time?
- What recommendations/learnings do you have for the organization?

APPENDIX I: Open Innovation Possibilities for TFA's Recruitment Team**Open Innovation Methods for TFA Recruitment****Idea competitions**

This method entails implementing a system that encourages competitiveness among contributors by rewarding successful submissions. This method provides organizations with inexpensive access to a large quantity of innovative ideas, while also providing a deeper insight into the needs of their customers and contributors.

External Idea Competition

Our initial competition might be a challenge to submit ideas for increasing spontaneous apps by a factor of 10X. One logical vendor for this competition would be MindSumo, who would help TFA to frame and execute the challenge for a relatively low cost for initial challenge (\$2500). MindSumo uses a network of 40,000 college student solvers (started with ivy-league schools) and offers small monetary incentives (\$150) for best solutions. This particular population would have unique insights into prospect experience and offer solutions that would resonate with the college-going population. This is also an opportunity to introduce ourselves to 40,000 college prospects and possibly increase our prospect pipeline.

Internal Idea Competition

Using similar techniques as the challenge above, offer a similarly framed challenge inside the organization to staff, CMs, Alumni. Internal ideas could use crowdsourcing to initially vet the interest in ideas and follow up with expertise for operational considerations. Incentives for ideas could include partial release time and small amount of seed funding (\$3000) to test/prototype the idea or longer term project management positions.

Hackathon Events

This particular method is a time-bound, playful competition to get lots of different folks all thinking deeply about the same challenge. Typically starts with a presentation of a challenge and ends with teams reporting out their ideas to the entire group.

External Partner Hackathon

Dedicate a certain time period (often 24 hours or 1 week) for “Friends of TFA” to engage in semi-structured design techniques to produce new models/ideas for recruitment. The value proposition for these friends (beyond mission alignment and benevolence) is the possibility to bring their own challenges to the newly created design consortium.

Internal Hackathon

Dedicate a certain time period (often 24 hours or 1 week) where staff engage in semi-structured design techniques to produce new ideas/models for recruitment. This could include recruitment team only, entire staff, CM, or alumni. Individuals/Groups with most promising ideas that result could be given small amount of seed funding (\$5000) and 10% release time to continue to test/prototype.

TFA “Google” Time (Recurring org-wide hackathon)

Set an expectation that the entire community engage in innovative projects outside of their typical daily work stream. This could look like one day a month (Google says 20% but there is no magic to that number) where the whole organization unplugs from daily work to “think of and test new ideas”. It could be established around topics (like recruiting) and they would use this recurring time to pursue/test these new ideas. The benefits of the entire organization pursuing this at once is availability of cross-functional teams to

Customer Immersion

This method involves extensive customer interaction using the employees of an organization. It provides user-centered insights into the experience that may lead to very different solutions.

Interview Reversal Technique

RM's use portion of on-campus meeting time to get reflections on the experience of prospects in lieu of “typical” face-to-face. One day of these types of interviews for every RM would produce enormous data around the prospect experience. Some training on empathic interviewing may be required, but would serve to build empathic capacity in the organization.

Prospect Simulations

Current TFAers “sign up” as prospects and receive all communication typically sent to prospects and journal their reactions. Another possible example is for staff or CMs to attend recruitment events/career fairs as participants, documenting their experience, the competitors in the space and how TFA “shows up” in the various systems in which it operates.

Idea Incubation

This method is the use of a sheltered lab that allows a team of innovators to incubate new ideas/models over a certain period of time. The lab usually operates outside the direct management of the functional unit and different metrics for success.

Recruiting Lab Fellowship

Offer a fellowship for existing staff to test out new techniques/models for recruitment on emerging/untapped campuses. Value proposition for fellows would be training on design thinking processes, lean-startup techniques, and access to senior leadership. Emergent ideas and resultant prototypes would be designed for rapid feedback, learning and adjustment. The lab would operate outside of recruitment structure, but communicate learnings consistently to RT.

Strategic Partnerships

Partner with analogous/competing organizations to increase reach with prospects and/or provide complementary services.

Partnering with Competitors

In the Boston area, partnering with Boston Teacher Residency or Match Teacher Residency to speak with prospects about alternative pathways to education, agreeing to split prospects by geographic preference (They get Boston folks, TFA gets rest of country).

Partnering with Complementers

Partnering with another organization with a complementary model for recruiting. (I.e. An org. that has less “boots on the ground”, but much more capacity and expertise in social media/digital presence) to learn from and share best practices. This could even involve a shared services approach to recruiting depending on mission alignment.